Ethics and Aesthetics

Democracy and Difference in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God

Pia Sandved Berg

Master's Thesis in Comparative Literature

Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages

Supervisor: Johan Schimanski

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2015

Ethics and Aesthetics

Difference and Democracy in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

2015

Ethics and Aesthetics: Democracy and Difference in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Pia Sandved Berg

http://www.duo.uio.no

Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between democracy and egalitarianism, as well as ethics and aesthetics in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It focuses on the ethics of postcolonial politics, and with the role aesthetics plays in the conveying of African American culture and tradition, and democracy, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The novel was criticized for its aestheticism when first published, but has since been read predominantly with attention to the feminist and postcolonial political potential within the novel. Modern democratic politics, understood as the distribution of power and goods between majority and minority, can however become a problem when dealing with postcolonial aesthetics and politics, because of the close historical and philosophical ties between equality and sameness. This thesis suggests an alternative ethical method of approach to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the context of postcolonial aesthetics and politics, centered on reading as an *experience* of difference and democracy through aesthetics, rather than on the political utility of the postcolonial novel, which the thesis, based on Aristotle's ethics and especially his friendship model, argues is an unethical approach.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Johan Schimanski, for all his help and support throughout the last year. His enthusiasm and critical feedback has been invaluable to the development and progress of this thesis. My friends also deserve special thanks; thank you for helping me, for listening to my complaining, and for providing fun distractions when necessary. No names mentioned, none forgotten. Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my mother and father, for everything.

I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes […] I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal.[1]

- Zora Neale Hurston.

[1] Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Chicaco: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 11.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston was an author and a social anthropologist, a significant figure in the Harlem Renaissance, and an outspoken defender of the African American cultural heritage and difference. She dedicated her life to collecting and preserving the stories of her African American people. She was praised and criticized, made famous for her temperament and eagerness, and then forgotten. Statements like the one quoted above made her a controversial member of the African American art scene and academia. She did not believe in the Racial Uplift Movement of the 1920's, and remained skeptical of the tactics behind the African American claim for equality throughout her life. She was a protector of cultural difference and a proud member of the African American culture. As such, her literature is a wonderful starting point for an inquiry into the relationship between egalitarianism and difference, and ethics and aesthetics in light of the postcolonial.

Postcolonial politics vs. postcolonial aesthetics is a relatively new area of critical discussion and research in the literary field. Academics like Elleke Boehmer, Chandani Lokuge and Graham Huggan have in recent years made important contributions to the discourse on postcolonial aesthetics. In 2013, Louisa Olufsen Layne wrote a master's thesis at the University of Oslo about the postcolonial aesthetics in Linton Kwesi Johnson's poetry.[2] My thesis will enter into that discourse from an ethical perspective, with a particular interest in the complicated relationships between equality and difference, and democracy and aesthetics. These topics of interest provide the thesis with a new point of entry into the established discourse.

Their Eyes Were Watching God[3] received mixed reviews when it was first published in 1937. The famous author Richard Wright was one of the harshest critics of the novel, accusing Hurston of portraying the African American people in a manner that was intended to make "the 'white folks' laugh".[4] Wright was probably infuriated by Hurston's use of eye dialect[5] in the novel, a technique that earlier had been used to indicate a difference between white and African American people's level of intelligence, class or education in novels like Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Hurston's reuse of this technique was in opposition to Wright's literary

[2] Louisa Olufsen Layne, "The Aesthetics of Bass: Aesthetics and Postcolonial Politics in Linton Kwesi Johnson's Poetry" (University of Oslo: Master's thesis, 2013).
[3] From now on, the novel will be referred to as *Their Eyes*.
[4] Richard Wright, "Between Laughter and Tears", http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam358/wrightrev.html.[Accessed 17.04.2015]
[5] Written dialect or sociolect; dialect or sociolect that is conveyed in writing.

program; he wished to shift the focus on to similarities between black and white people to strengthen the Racial Uplift cause, and show that the mistreating and suppression of the African Americans was a crime against equal and *similar* human beings. Hurston wanted to make the differences visible. She did not to support the claim of equality based on Wright's line of argumentation, because she did not believe in his vision of similarity. She experienced the African American people and their culture as something different, and believed that it had to be respected as something different if equality was ever to be achieved. The particularities of the dispute will be discussed in depth in the segment on critical reception later in this chapter.

The disagreement between Wright and Hurston is not just an interesting historical curiosity. It is also an outline of a discussion that has been central in literary theory, and especially postcolonial theory. The struggle between aesthetics and politics is longstanding in the literary field, and postcolonial theory has usually placed itself on the side of politics. The postcolonial movement has a clear and outspoken political motivation. I wish to question the foundation of this struggle between aesthetics and politics, and the valorization of politics as opposed to, and as incompatible with, aesthetics within the postcolonial discourse.

Zora Neale Hurston's literary production can be perceived as apolitical, an argument for art for art's sake. This is possible because of the aestheticism of her novels and short stories. In novels like *Their Eyes* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Hurston uses a combination of poetic high English and eye dialect from the rural parts of southern USA, and her narrative style and aesthetic choices are closer to European modernism than to Wright's social realistic fiction. However, it is also possible to read *Their Eyes* as a politically acute novel, dealing directly with the consequences of the abolition of slavery within the black community, presenting an at the time rare black, female perspective and contributing to the modernist discourse on identity. The point is that it can be read in both ways, and probably many more, and that plurality of possible readings, and how it correlates with ethics, politics and aesthetics is what is in question in this master's thesis.

The thesis has three categories of interest: ethics, politics and aesthetics. Ethics and politics have similarities, and are usually merged in the political category, as one can understand ethics as preliminary to, hence included in, politics. However, as ethical positioning usually is preliminary to the political interpretation, and because politics is not always ethical, I will include ethics as a category in its own. This choice is related to the *experience* of literature, which will be central to the thesis, and which is more naturally tied to Aristotle's practical approach to ethics on an individual human level than to political

philosophy, which in general is more focused on social and political systems, the larger picture.[6] Democracy and egalitarianism will also be important topics of discussion in the thesis, because they are political philosophies that are centered on an idea of universal equality. This idea needs to be problematized in light of ethics to ensure that the line of argumentation regarding egalitarianism is as comprehensive as possible, because the idea of justice and equality has to do with ethics as well as politics. This will be discussed in depth in the following chapter on ethics.

The common denominator in this system is the reader. Based on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* I choose to focus on the role of the singular individual, and on how reading may provide an experience that can widen and challenge a reader's understanding of her own role as a perceiver and interpreter of art in the world of postcolonial politics. Aristotle's ethics is founded on the singular human being, but Aristotle's idea is that making the individuals in a society ethically aware, eventually will lead to a more ethical society. It is the reader that has the power to make judgments and valorizations in the process of reading, and those decisions are interesting in a larger ethical and political context, because they can tell us something about the reader's position and situation in the world. I believe the link between the literature and the world is aesthetics.

Aesthetics is important because the first impression of a literary work usually is based on the aesthetical expression. It can be a book cover that compels us to buy the book, or it can be the language, or a general stylistic impression that makes the reader stop reading, or finish the book in a day. The politics of literature may be the most acute and important aspect of the study of literature in a postcolonial perspective, but the political struggle does not only happen on the surface of the literary. The aesthetics is important, and to show how and why, I will later argue that much of the political potential in *Their Eyes* is created by the aesthetical elements in the novel.

The three categories, ethics, politics and aesthetics are interdependent, but regularly treated autonomously in the study of literature, with claims of strictly ideological readings or similarly strictly aesthetical readings. My claim is that it is problematic and unethical to read with firm orientation, as all three categories are always active in the process of reading. You can single out aspects of your own reading to make it a discursive fit with one of the categories, but that is ultimately unethical, as you are eliminating elements of the reading experience to gain something from it. That reduces the interpretation of literature to what

[6] This is a broad generalization intended only to illustrate my reasons for taking an interest in ethics in relation to a matter that more commonly has been dealt with within the sphere of political thought.

Aristotle called a friendship of utility, a short-lived friendship based on personal gain. In Richard Wright's case, it was profitable for him to read *Their Eyes* as a bad novel, portraying African Americans as simple and unintelligent, because it strengthened his own literary program and political interests, and supported his own beliefs. That is an example of a method of approach that is still active in the critical discourse on literature.

This is not a defense of art for art's sake, rather it is a suggestion that art can be experienced for its own sake and still be ethically and politically interesting and relevant. Literature can be appreciated both for its aestheticism and its political relevance, and further, the one can enhance the other, rather than diminish each other. This might not seem like a particularly important or original suggestion, it is really what the study of literature is all about: putting the small elements together and seeing the bigger picture emerge, much like a jigsaw. However, it is not always that easy. The postcolonial research in the literary field is part of a larger, politically motivated struggle, and aesthetics can easily be deemed irrelevant to the anti-colonial political project, and overlooked. I will argue that aesthetics are as important to the political project as the directly political literary elements, and that the political potential cannot be fully comprehended without taking aesthetics into account.

The hope is that this inquiry into the relationship between ethics, politics and aesthetics in literature as a read experience will make possible a discussion of democracy and difference in the context of postcolonial aesthetics in *Their Eyes*.

1.1 Life and Work

Zora Neale Hurston fell into obscurity after leaving New York in the early 1950's. She went back to the area in Florida where she had grown up, and worked as a teacher's substitute and a maid. She continued to write, but most of her writings were not published, and what she did manage to get published, for the most part went unnoticed. She died in a nursing home in Fort Pierce, Florida in 1960, where she had been placed after suffering from a stroke. She was buried in an unmarked grave and forgotten, until Alice Walker rediscovered her literary and academic work in the early 1970's, and had her name and the words "A genius of the South" engraved on a gravestone in the cemetery where she was buried.[7] In what follows I will give a brief introduction to Zora Neale Hurston's life and work in order to contextualize how *Their Eyes* is related to the question of aesthetics and politics.

[7] Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Chicaco: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 3.

Almost all biographical and bibliographical information provided in the thesis have been found in Robert E. Hemenway's biography *Zora Neale Hurston* (1980). Very few other biographies have been written about Hurston, and the other biographies that exist, does not contradict or add anything of significance to this thesis to Hemenway's account of Hurston's life and work, and I have therefore chosen to use mainly the mentioned work.

Hurston grew up in Eatonville, Florida, a town run and inhabited by African Americans only. That same town is the main setting in *Their Eyes.* She left Eatonville around the age of 16, and went to Washington. Zora Neale Hurston's age remains a mystery, as she herself usually gave 1901 as her year of birth, but researchers have found that it is more likely, given the age of her eight siblings, that she was born early in the 1890's. Whichever age she was, she arrived in New York in 1925, hoping to start a career as a writer.[8] In Washington, she had been a student at Howard University, majoring in English. In New York, she met the editor of *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life,* Charles S. Johnson. It was a magazine published by the National Urban League, a civil rights organization working against racial discrimination on behalf of African Americans. Johnson saw potential in Hurston, and integrated her in the community surrounding the magazine. It was here that she got to know people like Richard Wright and Langston Hughes, and she soon became an integral part of the Harlem Renaissance.

In 1925, Hurston received a scholarship to attend Barnard College, the women's department of Columbia University, and was the only black student at the college.[9] It was at Barnard she got interested in social anthropology, and for two years, from 1925 to 27, she studied under the anthropologist Franz Boas.[10] Hurston decided to use her knowledge of anthropology to tell the stories of her Southern African American people, which culture and traditions she felt a strong connection to as she grew up in the South. She spent the next 20 years of her life collecting, transcribing and publishing African American folklore. She also used her collection of folklore and knowledge of the traditions and culture in her fictional literary work; *Their Eyes* is an example of just that. The combination of scientific method and personal experience provided Hurston with a very particular and accomplished eye for difference and culture, and an ability to be both a subjective member and an objective observer of the culture she immersed herself in for the social anthropology research, a double role which is also clearly present in the layered narrative of *Their Eyes*.

[8] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 9.
[9] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 21.
[10] Ibid.

Her writing career got off to a good start, and she was awarded several prizes and stipends for her short stories. It was in some ways a good time to be an African American artist in New York, as the economy kept growing and it had become popular amongst rich, white liberals to donate money to people such as Zora Neale Hurston. The patronage arrangements gave the black artists an opportunity to concentrate on their work, rather than on finding money to survive. However, the patronage arrangements were also problematic, as Zora Neale Hurston herself experienced.[11] Her patron, Mrs. Mason, was a demanding and difficult woman. She had been Langston Hughes' patron as well, but the arrangement lasted only for a very short period of time, because Hughes found it difficult to accept Mrs. Mason's meddling with his work.[12] Mrs. Mason, or "Godmother", as Hurston nicknamed her, funded most of Hurston's folklore collecting trips in the late 1920's and early 30's, until the relationship ended because of a disagreement about Hurston's ownership of her own work and right to publish it.[13] The patronage arrangement limited the artistic freedom because the artists became dependent on creating something the patron would find worthy of supporting economically, and because of the economic support, legal ownership of the material became an issue.

Though Zora Neale Hurston was a very productive writer who published many short stories in different magazines during her first years in New York, it was her personality that made her really famous. She was known to be very witty and outspoken, she demanded attention, and told wondrous and outrageous stories inspired by the folklore and storytelling techniques of the South. She was opinionated about the political aspects of the Harlem Renaissance, and is said to have ironically referred to the members of the racial uplift movement as "Negrotarians".[14] She took issue with the way the struggle for racial equality was being handled by the leaders of the movement, and accused them of building their case for equality on sameness, by mimicking white people's style and manner. In *Their Eyes*, Janie's second husband, Joe Starks, is portrayed in a way similar to how Hurston accused the leaders of the racial uplift movement of behaving. He tries to dress, talk and live like he imagines a white man would, and ends up suppressing Janie, her difference and cultural heritage to the point where their marriage is ruined by it. In the end, when he is dying, he tries to return to the African American cultural sphere by hiring a false hoodoo doctor to help him, but by then it is too late, and he dies a miserable and lonely man. The relationship

[11] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 104-35.
[12] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 107.
[13] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 104-35.
[14] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 21-2.

between Janie and Joe Starks can be read as an allegory of what Zora Neal Hurston feared would happen to the African American culture if it was not respected and protected against the idea of sameness as necessary for equality.

Hurston was a diverse author. She made her literary debut in 1922 when she had three poems published in the weekly newspaper *Negro World*.[15] Three years later she published her play *Color Struck* in *Opportunity*, and that was how she got her real breakthrough as a writer. The play was nominated and awarded second prize in *Opportunity's* 1925 contest for best play. She continued publishing poems, short stories and plays in different magazines, and in 1931 she published her first research article "Hoodoo in America" in the *Journal of American Folklore*.[16] Her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Wine*, was published in 1934 on J. B. Lippincott. It came as a result of an inquiry made by Betram Lippincott, who had been impressed by her 1933 short story "The Gilded Six-Bits" and wondered whether she had any plans to write a novel. *Jonah's Gourd Wine* is considered an autobiographical novel, based on the marriage between Hurston's parents.[17]

A year later, in 1935, the non-fictional collection of folklore from the South was published in a book entitled *Mules and Men.* It was a result of several years of work, collecting and transcribing stories told among the African American people in the rural South. Though it is non-fiction, Zora Neale Hurston created a narrative around it and gave it a stylistic frame, to connect the collected stories and create a consistency between them. She was criticized for this stylistic choice by other academics that argued that the aesthetics of *Mules and Men* was unscientific, because it ruined the objectivity of the research.[18] For Hurston however, the aestheticism was necessary and natural, as she saw folklore as a form of art: "[Folklore] is the art people create before they find out there is such a thing as art…"[19] She wanted to put folklore in the context of art, as that was how she experienced it: as art.

Mules and Men received harsh critique, especially from the black academic and artistic community based in Harlem. It was accused of being a naïve depiction of the African American reality; of seeming uninterested in the African American struggle for equality, and of being politically reactionary. Zora Neale Hurston was, as mentioned, a contemporary of Richard Wright and Langston Hughes, and knew them both from her time in the Harlem Renaissance. Though they travelled in the same social and academic circles, their political

[15] *Negro World* was published by the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA).
[16] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography,* 77.
[17] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 188-92.
[18] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography,* 166-7.
[19] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 159.

views were dissimilar. Wright and Hughes belonged to the political left wing, both members of the Communist party, both writing what you might call social realistic, proletarian literature. Compared to their literary efforts, largely devoted to political awareness and racial struggle, Hurston's *Mules and Men*, and two years later, *Their Eyes*, seemed stripped of the political acuteness many authors and academics expected from an African American writer at the time.[20]

Zora Neale Hurston's literary project was to show the inherent beauty in the African American culture, instead of comparing it to the culture, standards and lives of white people, as often was the strategy employed by her left wing contemporaries to show the inequality and the injustice done to African Americans. Hurston was an outspoken advocate against the racial uplift program of the 1920's and 30's. From her point of view, the program worked against itself, as it focused on the wrongs and horrors, rather than on the survival, the life and strength of the African American people: "We talk about the race problem a great deal, but go on living and laughing and striving like everybody else."[21] Her literary and political project was to invite the reader into the African American life and culture, and letting it stand on its own, without making obvious, politically motivated comparisons to white culture. Hurston's project was based on racial and cultural pride, and on confidence in her readers. "The sobbing school of Negrohood"[22] was Hurston's main target, and several of its key members, amongst them Richard Wright, criticized *Their Eyes* harshly when it was first published.

Their Eyes is Zora Neale Hurston's second and most critically acclaimed novel. It was published in the fall of 1937, and took her about seven weeks to write.[23] *Their Eyes* can be read as a continuation of the *Mules and Men*-project; only now Hurston placed the real stories she had collected on her trips to the South in a strictly fictional, aesthetic frame. The documentary elements of *Mules and Men* were replaced with poetic imagination. As will be shown and discussed in the segment on reception, the novel created heated public debates when it was first published because of the way Hurston had chosen to portray African American life in the rural South. It landed, and still lands, squarely in the argument between the aesthetical and the political in the postcolonial discourse, and was by many read as a

[20] This is based on Robert E. Hemenway's research as presented in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, especially the chapter "Crayon Enlargements of Life", 218-245.
[21] "Zora Neale Hurston", in *Twentieth Century Authors*, ed. Stanley Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1942), 694-95.
[22] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 11.
[23] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 230.

commercial project, a "crowd pleaser" without any real substance.[24] In Zora Neale Hurston's literary bibliography, *Their Eyes* stands out as her most successful project in terms of her wish to combine the portrayal of real African American life with aesthetics.

Zora Neale Hurston spent much of her life travelling. She travelled back and forth between New York and Florida for her work, and also visited many different islands in the Caribbean to collect folklore. At the same time, she managed to write and publish regularly. She could not afford to emerge herself completely in her folklore anthropology, as she was completely dependent on receiving research grants and money from the sales of her books. Even if she could afford to stop writing, she would probably have continued. To live off her writing was her dream; the academic work was something she grew into. After *Their Eyes* she published two more novels: *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) and *Seraph On the Suwanee* (1948), none of which reached the same popularity or got the same amount of publicity *Their Eyes* did. She also wrote another non-fictional academic book on folklore in this period, entitled *Tell My Horse* (1938), and the autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942). By the time *Seraph on the Suwanee* was published, Hurston had begun to slip into obscurity.

Very little is known of Hurston's last years. She had little money, she had moved back to Florida and stopped visiting New York, and she had little contact with her old friends or family. In 1959, Zora Neale Hurston was admitted to Saint Lucie County welfare home, because she was no longer able to take care of herself, economically or otherwise. She passed away three months later, in January 1960. She was buried in the Garden of Heavenly Rest in Fort Pierce, Florida, in the segregated cemetery. She had no money, but a week after her death, donations amounting to four hundred dollars had been given by friends, publishers and colleagues to ensure that she had a proper burial.[25] The minister leading the funeral said the following about Zora Neale Hurston: "They said she couldn't become a writer recognized by the world. But she did it. The Miami paper said she died poor. But she died rich. She did something."[26] Her belongings were to be burnt, but a law officer who was friendly with Hurston passed by as it was about to happen, put out the fire and donated her all her papers and notes to the University of Florida Library.

Zora Neale Hurston was a very special woman who believed that her cultural heritage was worth protecting and being proud of. She believed in a world where one does not have to

[24] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 233.
[25] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 347-8.
[26] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 348.

be the same to be equal, where all people can celebrate their difference and still expect the same basic human rights as the members of the majority culture. She was an artist and an academic, and she combined the two professions with great skill. Her literary work, and especially *Their Eyes,* is demanding and aesthetically beautiful, and though the reader may not necessarily be able to understand and properly contextualize the story that is told, it provides an experience that is valuable in itself.

1.2 History of Reception

In what follows I deal with both the critical and the scholarly reception of *Their Eyes.* My motivation for doing so is to further establish the role political struggles have played in the reception of *Their Eyes*, both when it was first published, and in recent years. This is important to the thesis as a whole, because it will provide insight into the novel's traditional discursive belonging, and make possible an analysis of how the categories ethics, aesthetics and politics have been employed as reading strategies, and been valorized in previous readings of the novel.

1.2.1 Critical Reception

Their Eyes was written during one of Zora Neale Hurston's visits to Jamaica. She sent the finished manuscript to her publisher, J. B. Lippincott & Co, upon her return to New York in March 1937, and by fall the same year, the novel was published.[27]

Richard Wright wrote a review of *Their Eyes* in *New Masses* called "Between laughter and tears". It presents a harsh critique of the novel. Wright states initially in the review: "Miss Hurston seems to have no desire whatever to move in the direction of serious fiction…"[28] He admits that Hurston "can write"[29], and that she "manages to catch the psychological movements of Negro folk-mind in their pure simplicity"[30] in her dialogues, but that is "as far as it goes."[31] Wright's statement that Hurston is not writing serious fiction corresponds with their diverging political views and aesthetical ideals as dealt with previously. It seems that from Wright's point of view, Hurston's lack of radical political realism is an insult to the African American race and culture:

[27] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography,* 231.
[28] Wright, Richard, *New Masses* 5. October 1937, (http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam358/wrightrev.html). [Accessed 17.04.2015.]
[29] Ibid
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

> Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theatre, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the "white folks" laugh. Her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears.[32]

The review goes on in the same harsh tone, ending with the sentence: "She exploits that phase of Negro life which is 'quaint', the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the 'superior' race."[33] Wright and Hurston had dissimilar aesthetic visions and political opinions, which is clear both in their literary productions and in their political statements. Wright was a Marxist writing social realist fiction; Hurston had slightly conservative political views and wrote modernist prose. Though, however different their literary contributions and projects might have been, their goal was the same: to change the power relation between races in America to attribute more value to the African American race and culture. In that sense, they both wrote political literature, but chose to attack the problem at hand from different angles.

Zora Neale Hurston did not publically respond to Richard Wrights review. It was not until another of her acquaintances from the Harlem Renaissance period wrote a review of *Their Eyes* that Hurston made her voice heard her in the public discussion of her novel. Alain Locke was the editor of *The New Negro,* and a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance. In January 1938, Locke reviewed the novel in *Opportunity*, also criticizing it harshly.

> But when will the Negro novelist of maturity, who knows how to tell a story convincingly – which is Miss Hurston's cradle gift, come to grips with motive fiction and social document fiction? Progressive southern fiction has already banished the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over and envy. Having gotten rid of condescension, let us now get over oversimplification![34]

Locke's review is less harsh than Wright's. He praises Hurston for her "gift for poetic phrase"[35], and states that "Janie's story should not be re-told; it must be read."[36] However, though the criticism is more balanced and less direct than what Wright's was, the verdict is similar. Both Wright and Locke want Hurston to write social document fiction, and Locke's initial praise of Hurston's "gift for poetic phrase" turns sarcastic as the review moves on to

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Alan Locke, http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam358/wrightrev.html.[Accessed 17.04.2015]
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

claim that the novel's poeticism "keep her […] from diving down deep either to the inner psychology of characterization or to sharp analysis of social background."[37] Alain Locke and Richard Wright shared aesthetical ideals, and none of them realized the novel's political potential. In later years, *Their Eyes* has been recognized as a significant work of feminist and postcolonial fiction. Wright and Locke expected the members of the Harlem Renaissance to write politically acute social document fiction, and Hurston did not comply with that expectation.

Though Richard Wright and Alain Locke were highly critical of Zora Neale Hurston's stylistic and aesthetical choices in *Their Eyes*, many were impressed. The novel got generally good reviews, many emphasizing the quality of the story and the interesting use of language.[38] However, as Hemenway points out in his biography on Zora Neale Hurston, white critics, fueling the critical perspectives of Wright and Locke, wrote a number of the positive reviews: "The white establishment failed to recognize that her [Hurston's] subject was purposefully chosen; they liked the story, but usually for the wrong reasons."[39]

The contemporary reception of *Their Eyes* is made complex by the fact that not many grasped what Hurston's literary and political project consisted in, and that the two projects were related through the aesthetics of *Their Eyes*. The Marxist perspective, represented by Wright and Locke, missed or overlooked the political perspective in Hurston's novel because they expected as less subtle and aestheticized portrayal of African American life. Most of the remaining critics were misled by her aestheticism and the compelling story, reading it as entertainment and thus overlooking the cultural, racial and feministic perspectives present in the novel.

The contemporary reception of *Their Eyes* was diverse and diverging. Most of the critics seemed to agree that it was a beautifully written novel, with a poetic and rich language. After Alain Locke's review in *Opportunity*, Hurston wrote an angry response, which she tried to get published in *Opportunity*. In the letter to Locke, she lashed out against both his review, and him personally, claiming he knew "nothing about Negroes",[40] a claim that sprung from Hurston's frustration with the racial uplift movements focus on the similarities between African Americans and whites, rather than taking pride in the cultural differences between African American and white majority culture. *Opportunity* refused to print the letter.

---

[37] Ibid.
[38] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography,* 241.
[39] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography,* 240-41.
[40] Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography,* 241.

Their Eyes received press when it was first published, but after a while, the novel fell into obscurity. It was not until a decade after Zora Neale Hurston's death in 1960 that her literary project was really appreciated in full and gained critical acknowledgement. The African American novelist and poet Alice Walker is often credited for the rediscovery of Hurston's contributions to modern American fiction. In 1970 Walker was looking for material on hoodoo, and found Hurston's *Mules and Men*. In 1975 she published the article "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston". That was the beginning of what has become an extensive academic and critical discourse on Hurston's literary work, both fictional and non-fictional.

The rediscovery of Hurston's literary production was timed with the blossoming of postcolonial theory in the literary field. Three years after Walker's "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston", Edward Said published the pivotal work *Orientalism*. Since then, *Their Eyes* has been read and reread, discussed and analyzed continuously in literature departments all over the world. Zora Neale Hurston has been the theme of conferences, her last home in Florida was made a National Historic Landmark, and she has a museum dedicated to her in Eatonville, Florida. It took the world almost forty years to recognize Zora Neale Hurston's literary accomplishments, but in 2010 she was included in the New York Writers Hall of Fame, and *Their Eyes* and her other publications continue to be appreciated and discussed in literary establishments around the world.

1.2.2 Scholarly Reception

For a long time, no scholarly research was done on Zora Neale Hurston's literary production. Until Alice Walker rediscovered her work in the 1970s, there had been little or no academic interest in either Hurston's fiction or her non-fiction. The scholarly interest in *Their Eyes* has become widespread over the last thirty years or so, as feminist theory and postcolonial studies have become obligatory in literature programs at university level in most countries. At the University of Oslo, there have been written three master's theses on *Their Eyes*, first in 1988,[41] then in 2004[42] and the last one in 2005.[43] The two earliest, 1988 and 2004, employ a feminist perspective, the last one a postcolonial perspective. Though there are only three theses written about the novel at the University of Oslo, they seem to be representative in

[41] Haldis Hamnen, "The Role of Racism and Sexism in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Alice Walker's *Meridian*, and Toni Morrison's *Sula*" (University of Oslo: Master's thesis, 1988).
[42] Vibeke Jullum, "Revolutionary Petunias: Rebel Women in Novels by Larsen, Hurston, Morrison, and Walker" (University of Oslo: Master's thesis, 2004).
[43] Tone Gjul Gardsjord, ""Where're You Bound?": Migration in Search of Home and Idenity in *Home to Harlem*, *Quicksand*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" (University of Oslo: Master's thesis, 2005).

their choice of theoretical and interpretive perspectives, as feminist and postcolonial theory are the two most applied theoretical perspectives in the scholarly reception of *Their Eyes*.

1970-1986: The Beginning

In the University of Oslo library database, the earliest registered scholarly work done on *Their Eyes* is a 1972 article called "The Significance of Time in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" written by James R. Giles for the journal *Negro American Literature Forum*. From 1972 to 1976, there is no scholarly work registered. One of the two registered articles written in 1976 also deals with the temporal aspect of the novel, and is written by Peter Schwalbenberg. It was published in the same journal as the 1972 article, *Negro American Literature Forum*. From 1976 to 1986 there are fourteen entries specifically on *Their Eyes,*[44] four of them are written with a feminist perspective,[45] three with special attention to the folkloric aspects of the novel.[46] There is also one article presenting a comparative reading of the novel in question and Toni Morrison's *Sula.*[47] Many scholars have repeated this particular comparative perspective after Diane Matza's 1985 article. The years between 1970 and 1986 marks the beginning of the scholarly discourse on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes*. The feminist perspective is clearly present already in this period of research, and the articles written on folklore in *Their Eyes* may be interpreted as a foreshadowing of the postcolonial perspectives that the novel is to be examined with in the more recent scholarly reception.

1987-1995: The Development of Third Wave Feminism

In 1990, Michael Awkward published a collection of scholarly essays: *New Essays on* Their Eyes Were Watching God, in which were printed four essay's in addition to Awkward's own introduction. The two first, written by Robert E. Hemenway and Nelly McKay, focuses on

[44]I have only counted entries that deal specifically with the novel in question, either on its own, or in comparison with other literary works. I have excluded book reviews, biographical works and works were either the novel or Zora Neale Hurston is only mentioned.

[45] Claire Crabtree, "The Confluence of Folklore, Feminism and Black Self-Determination in Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God"," *The Southern Literary Journal* 17, no. 2 (1985).; Missy Dehn Kubitschek, ""Tuh De Horizon and Back": The Female Quest in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Black American Literature Forum* 17, no. 3 (1983).; Donald R. Marks, "Sex, Violence, and Organic Consciousness in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," ibid.19, no. 4 (1985).; Mary Jane Lupton, "Zora Neale Hurston and the Survival of the Female," *The Southern Literary Journal* 15, no. 1 (1982).

[46] Cyrena N. Pondrom, "The Role of Myth in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *American Literature* 58, no. 2 (1986).; Carol Anne Noel, "The Function of Folklore in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," (1985).

[47] Diane Matza, "Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*: A Comparison," *MELUS* 12, no. 3 (1985).

the personal and autobiographical elements of *Their Eyes*. The third essay, by Hazel V. Carby, is about the impact of anthropology and folklore in the novel. The last is a feminist reading with particular focus on the culturally determined sexism portrayed in the novel, and was written by Rachel Blau Duplessis. This collection of essays sums up the scholarly discourse on the novel up until 1990.

In the years between 1987 and 1995, feminist theory was the dominant theoretical approach to *Their Eyes*. The popularity of this particular theoretical path during the years in question probably has to do with the end of second-wave feminism in the late 1980s, and the beginning of third-wave feminism in the early 1990s. Many of the articles written about the novel in this time period, focused on Janie's path to selfhood, on her journey towards becoming a fulfilled, complete and self-reflective woman.

The second-wave feminism had, by the end of the 1980s, received criticism for being essentialist, for being a movement reserved for white, heterosexual middleclass women, and the new wave of feminists wanted to distance themselves from this critique. As a result, it appears the feminist discourse on *Their Eyes* became less 'general' during these years. The feminist readings of the novel took less interest in the larger social and historical picture, and focused more on the text itself and the feminist project within the novel, often in relation to culturally determined factors. Janie's voice, the symbolic use of speech and silence, was one of the most popular subjects of inquiry for the scholars in this period.[48] There seems also to have been a heightened awareness of class, race and cultural belonging in addition to gender, most likely also a result of the development of the third-wave feminism and its wish to distance itself from the essentialism of the second-wave feminism.[49] The postcolonial perspective was largely combined with the feminist approach in the period in question, as the focus mainly was Janie, her otherness and personal development, categories that lend themselves easily both to feminist and postcolonial analysis. Hurston's use of folklore in *Their Eyes* continued to be of interest in the scholarly discourse, especially in the beginning of this period.[50]

---

[48] Dolan Hubbard, " '... Ah Said Ah'd Save De Text for You' ": Recontextualizing the Sermon to Tell (Her) Story in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *African American Review* 27, no. 2 (1993).; Maria J. Racine, "Voice and Interiority in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," ibid.28 (1994).

[49] Julie Roemer, "Celebrating the Black Female Self: Zora Neale Hurston's American Classic (Reclaiming the Canon)," *English Journal* 78, no. 7 (1989).; Brenda M. Greene, "Addressing Race, Class, and Gender in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: Strategies & Reflections," *English Education* 27, no. 4 (1995).

[50] SallyAnn Ferguson, "Folkloric Men and Female Growth in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Black American Literature Forum* 21, no. 1/2 (1987).; Klaus Benesch, "Oral Narrative and Literary Text: Afro-American Folklore in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Callaloo*, no. 36 (1988).

1996-2005: Feminism and Postcolonial Theory

By 1996 the scholarly reception of Hurston had grown into a sizeable discourse, and a large part of it was still employing feminist reading strategies. This theoretical trend continued in the years between 1996-2005, with special emphasis on Janie's voice, the novel's narrative hierarchy and use of speech and silence. However, as the novel by 1996 was much written about, many scholars began to think in other terms, and employ new perspectives in their work with *Their Eyes*. The development of New Historicism in literary theory made an impact on the scholarly reception of the novel in these years, with several articles about the larger social and economic context the novel was written in (the Great Depression), and how this context is reflected in the novel.[51] Another interest became the use and interpretations of the law, legality and justice in the novel, also a result of the newly popular New Historicism.[52]

During the years in question, the scholarly reception of *Their Eyes* was broadened and extended into new fields of literary theory and interpretation. The development was a natural one, stemming from the already large quantity of scholarly work done on the novel and, from the end of the 1990s, from a fall in popularity of feminist literary theory. The feminist perspectives are still present in the scholarly reception in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but there are not as many 'pure' feminist articles written about the novel. The feminist perspectives are more often combined with other theoretical angles, because the novel's many layers of power structures, not only those regarding the feminine or sexism, comes into interest among scholars during the period in question. Scholarly work interpreting race, gender and class issues in *Their Eyes* became more common, as did work with narrower and less self-evident fields of research, as for instance Tina Barr's 2002 article "'Queen of the Niggerati' and the Nile: The Isis-Osiris Myth in Zora Neale Hurston's *There Eyes Were Watching God*".

2006-: New Developments in Postcolonial Theory

Their Eyes' popularity as the object of study in the literature field peaked in the 1990's. The peak coincides, not surprisingly, with the poststructuralist feminist movement's golden era in

[51]Todd McGowan, "Liberation and Domination: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the Evolution of Capitalism," *MELUS* 24, no. 1 (1999).; T. F. Haddox, "The Logic of Expenditure in 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' (Zora Neale Hurston)," *Mosaic-J. Interdiscip. Study Lit.* 34, no. 1 (2001).

[52] Alicia M. Renfroe, "Interrogations of Justice in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Cycnos* 19, no. 2 (2002).; Laura H. Korobkin, "Legal Narratives of Self-Defense and Self-Effacement in 'Their Eyes Were Watching God.'" *Studies in American Fiction* 31, no. 1 (2003).

literature studies. However, even after 2006, there is still much feminist research being done in regards to the novel in question. The research perspectives have become more imaginative than in the 1990's, but there are still academics publishing articles on voice, individuality and otherness in *Their Eyes*.[53] There has even been published a collection of essays entitled *Women's Issues in Zora Neale Hurston's* Their Eyes Were Watching God as late as in 2012.[54] Culturally specific readings that focus on themes and intertexts related to the novel's cultural and historical context and Zora Neale Hurston's personal interests are relatively new research perspectives that have come forth during the last years.[55] Other research trends are related to questions of belonging, human transition and liminality. This perspective is the least developed and examined, because it is relatively unfamiliar territory in the literary field as a whole. It is mainly one academic, Péter Gaál-Szabó, who has worked with this particular research perspective, but he has published a significant amount of articles and books on the topic.[56]

Summary

The academic discourse on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes* is a large mass of similarity and diversity. The novel received little or no interest from academic circles until Alice Walker's rediscovery in 1970, and there were not much scholarly work done on *Their Eyes* in the first decade or so after Walker made her initial attempts at directing attention to Hurston's literary oeuvre. The academic interest grew gradually, and seems to have reached its height with feminist deconstruction in the late 1980s and 1990s. However, the discourse in this period was somewhat uniform, mainly focusing on the novel's internal feminist structures and

[53] David Ikard, "Ruthless Individuality and the Other(Ed) Black Women in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.(Critical Essay)," *CLA Journal* 53, no. 1 (2009); Keiko Dilbeck, "Symbolic Representation of Identity in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *The Explicator* 66, no. 2 (2008); James Phelan, *Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937): Bildung and the Rhetoric and Politics of Voice* (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2013).

[54] Gary Wiener (ed.) and Group Gale, *Women's Issues in Zora Neale Hurston's* Their Eyes Were Watching God, Gale Virtual Reference Library (Detroit: Detroit : Greenhaven Press, 2012).

[55] Daphne Lamothe, "*Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the Vodou Intertext," (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc., 2011); B. R. Roberts, "Archipelagic Diaspora, Geographical Form, and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *American Literature* 85, no. 1 (2013); Laura Dubek, "'[J]Us' Listenin' Tuh You": Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and the Gospel Impulse," *The Southern Literary Journal* 41, no. 1 (2009).

[56] Peter Gaal-Szabo, *"*Ah Done Been Tuh De Horizon and Back*":*Zora Neale Hurston's Cultural Spaces in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2011); Péter Gaál-Szabó, "Liminal Places and Zora Neale Hurston's Religio-Cultural Space in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 19, no. 1 (2013); Peter Gaal-Szabo, ""They Got Tuh Find out About Livin' Fuh Theyselves": Female Places and Masculine Spaces in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*.(Critical Essay)," *The AnaChronisT* (2011).

Janie's voice and growth within that structure. That particular topic was almost exhausted in about a decade, and the literary scholars begun to find new interpretive strategies and theoretical frameworks. The feminist perspective was maintained also after that shift, but the articles about Janie's path to selfhood and self-reflectiveness within the framework of feminist theory became fewer, because so much had already been written about that topic.

From the late 1990s and up until today, the discourse on *Their Eyes* has become much more diverse than in the decades before. The shift happened both due to shifts in literary theory in general; the theory boom ended and deconstruction lost its status as the leading light in the literary field; and due to the amount of work already done on the novel. Feminist theory is still very much present in the scholarly discourse on the novel, but there seems to be greater diversity in the ways it is employed now than earlier. The postcolonial perspective has been used on *Their Eyes* in more or less obvious ways since the 1970s, but when feminist theory fell out of popularity in the late 1990s, postcolonial theory experienced the opposite. Most of the clearly postcolonial work done on the novel in question is done after 2000. Before that, there was much interest in the folkloric aspects of the novel, but the postcolonial field had not yet developed into a clearly defined area of literary theory, and many of the earlier texts on folklore in *Their Eyes* thus lacks that clear colonial/postcolonial perspective. The fact that the definition of postcolonial literature as broadened much since the beginning in the 1970's is also significant in reviewing this development, as *Their Eyes* is not an 'obvious' part of the postcolonial literary production, because African Americans in the U.S. have not been clearly placed in the historical frame of colonized/decolonized. This perception of the African American culture has become more accepted in recent years, and so the postcolonial discourse around *Their Eyes* has grown.

The most important thing that has happened since the beginning of the 1970s, both from a feminist and a postcolonial perspective, is the acceptance of *Their Eyes* into the American literary canon. From being a criticized and scholarly unrecognized novel for several decades, *Their Eyes* has become a popular, widely read and celebrated work of literary art. It is obligatory reading in many American high schools and universities.

The most interesting result of this research in regards to the thesis is the amount of politically oriented work that has been done with the novel. My research has not revealed a single article written after 1980 that has a clear aesthetic reading strategy. Where the aestheticism of the novel is taken into account, it is briefly and only to emphasize an otherwise ideological interpretation. That is interesting, because a novel like *Their Eyes* lends itself very easily to an aesthetical reading; it is stylistically close to European modernism, a

literary period that traditionally prioritizes aestheticism both in the fiction itself and the theory applied to it. These findings will be relevant throughout the thesis.

1.3 Scope and Structure of the Thesis

The scope of the thesis is wide at the point of departure, and as a result, much time is spent establishing a theoretical framework. That is necessary, to avoid an unmanageable level of abstraction that will occur if the theoretical premises of the study are not made clear enough in the early stages of the work. The theory is therefore placed before the reading of the novel, to ensure that the reader of this thesis will be able to follow the process of reading and interpreting *Their Eyes,* with knowledge of what is at stake as it takes place. This limits the amount of repetition, as it is not necessary to refer to my own reading of *Their Eyes* at every stage of the theoretical discussion. However, *Their Eyes* is continually tied into this theoretical framework to ensure that the theory does not overpower the literature, as it is *Their Eyes* that is the point of departure and the point of return in the thesis.

The three categories of interest: ethics, aesthetics and politics are philosophically complex matters and much debated in the study of literature, and it is therefore necessary to enter the discourse already situated in the theoretical landscape. My perspective originates in deconstructive theory, and my hope is that I find a way of conveying how the experience of literature can become a part of a bigger, political world, without diminishing the singularity of the art. The idea is inspired by Jacques Derrida's *teleiopoesis*, a term that is thoroughly accounted for in the following chapter. I spend time reading and analyzing terminology, statements and other excerpts of relevant texts, as well as contextualizing and accounting for material that is philosophically relevant to the thesis as a whole. Ultimately, however, this thesis is about *Their Eyes*, and the particular experience that can be derived from the novel.

I begin by laying the ethical foundation, which is Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* in the second chapter. My main topics of interest in Aristotle's ethics are the ethical friendship model and the principle of the golden mean. These thought structures are reoccurring ideas that are important throughout the thesis, as they function both as points of return, ideas that reoccurs and shape the outcome of the thesis, and as points of arguments, ideas that are problematized and challenged during the course of the thesis, and thus contribute to the philosophical process in the thesis. Aristotle's understanding of ethics as preliminary to, and inseparable from, politics will be further accounted for, but has already been established as the foundation of the philosophical inquiry that will be conducted in what is to follow.

To create tension and discussion in the chapter on ethics, I read Jacques Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship*, which challenges the *Nicomachean* friendship model. Derrida supports the Aristotelian idea of ethics and politics as interchangeable, but adds that the relationship is not necessarily always respected as interchangeable. Derrida broadens the Aristotelian friendship model, and makes it possible to apply it to postcolonial literature, by challenging Aristotle's idea of sameness as necessary for good friendship. As a result of this reasoning, he develops the term *teleiopoesis*, which is significant in the reading of *Their Eyes* and in the development of a final conclusion.

After this initial introduction to the ethical framework, I move on to the political in chapter three. I use Aristotle and Derrida's shared understanding of the relationship of interdependence between ethics and politics, and focus mainly on Derrida's idea of how friendship and democracy is related. I discuss the democratic potential in literature, and in *Their Eyes* in particular, and use Mikhail M. Bakhtin's theory of the novel, and Jacques Rancière's theory of democratic literature to broaden the scope of the discussion. Ultimately, the goal is to show how the stylistic and aesthetic elements in literature are important to the development of an ethical and political interpretation, an idea that both Rancière and Bakhtin, in different ways, touch on.

This philosophical examination of the democratic potential inherent in literature is then put into contact with the postcolonial perspective. I discuss the question of postcolonial politics and postcolonial aesthetics, as the relationship between the two reading orientations is problematic in the postcolonial discourse. Furthermore, Elleke Boehmer's attempt at defining a postcolonial aesthetic is examined, and the idea of a universal definition of postcolonial aesthetics will be problematized. The political profile of the postcolonial movement, how that political profile affects the reading process and the literary experience, and ultimately what consequences it may have for postcolonial literature, is my main topics of interest. The hypothesis is that the politically motivated reading potentially can reduce literature to the point where it is only interesting because of its political potential, and is no longer respected as an artistic expression. This is discussed in relation to *Their Eyes* particularly, a novel that was originally criticized for lack of political acuteness in the critical reception, but has been read mainly as a political novel in the scholarly reception.

This discussion of the role of the aesthetical and the political in the postcolonial discourse lays the foundation for a debate about egalitarianism in relation to literature. This corresponds with the questions about sameness and equality previously dealt with in the chapter on ethics, and will be woven into the philosophical fabric of the thesis. The word

‘egalitarianism’ has mostly positive political connotations. It is closely linked to equality and usually used to describe a conviction that all people have a universal claim to equality, and should be treated equally. However, when applied as a principle in relation to postcolonial aesthetics, ethics and politics, egalitarianism becomes problematic, because the grounds for the claim of a sort of natural or biological right to equality can become a threat to the cultural difference that was so important to Zora Neale Hurston. The presented critical interpretation of egalitarianism springs from Derrida’s criticism of the Western philosophical tradition’s acceptance of interdependence between sameness and equality, as established by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In chapter four, *Their Eyes* is read and interpreted. I wish to provide a reading that is respectful and ethical in the sense that it does not exclude elements related to the three categories of interest, and show how the novel uses the aesthetic to express the ethical and political. The reading of the novel is performed as a traditional literary analysis, as I will move from the structural to the thematic, encompassing as many aspects of the novel as possible. Each of these aspects is tied to the questions of democracy, aesthetics, egalitarianism and justice. I examine the novel’s use of eye dialect alongside poetic high English, and how this conscious use of ‘high’ and ‘low’ challenge the reader’s preconfigured concept of high and low culture. Chapter four will be a chapter focused on the aesthetical experience rather than on theoretical argumentation. It will be a chapter dedicated to practicing what I have preached, and seeing whether it is possible to accomplish an ethical reading, a reading based on the ideal of the golden mean.

Chapter five is the closing chapter. It will be used to gather the philosophical threads from the previous chapters.

2 Ethics: The Aristotelian Friendship Model and *Teleiopoesis*

Aristotle is commonly regarded as one of the most influential philosophers in Western history. His philosophical contributions have been of importance to many academic fields besides philosophy, amongst them the literary field. His treaties on poetics and rhetoric have been pivotal in the development of literary theory, and both are usually read as introductionary texts in literature departments at university level. The *Nicomachean Ethics* however, is not as commonly read in relation to the study of literature. In what follows, I will argue that reading is a process with significant ethical and political implications, and that the ethical and political is connected, but also distinguishable from each other. The politics of reading is not an unfamiliar area of interest in literary studies, but instead of leaping directly to the discussion of the political aspects of reading, the theoretical foundation is Aristotle's ethics. This choice is based on Aristotle's theory of the good friendship, which states that a good friendship is entirely based on the ethics of being a good man, and that politics (the distribution of power and goods) therefore is extinct in this particular type of relationship. The goal of this inquiry is to find out whether it is possible to make a conscious choice to be an ethical reader of literature, and what such an ethical position might entail, both for the reader and for the literature read. In keeping with the practical principle of Aristotelian ethics, the theoretical results of this inquiry will attempted in the reading of *Their Eyes* in chapter four of this thesis.

2.1 Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Aristotle's ethical oeuvre consists of four treatises: *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, *Magna Moralia* and *On Virtues and Vices*. The *Nicomachean* and the *Eudemian Ethics* are similar; three of the books in each treaty are almost identical. The *Magna Moralia* is shorter than the two first mentioned and is now commonly considered to be by one of Aristotle's students. *On Virtues and Vices* is no longer assumed to be a work by Aristotle.[57] Taking into account the age of these treatises, it is hard to be conclusive about their origin, but there is no doubt in the philological and philosophical field that Aristotle is the rightful author of the

[57] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3. Ed. and trans.: C. J. Rowe and Sarah Broadie.

Nicomachean and *Eudemian Ethics.* I have chosen to work with the *Nicomachean Ethics,* as it is generally considered a later, revised and more thorough version of the *Eudemian*.[58]

The philosophical treaty consists of ten books; each dealing with a different subject related to the ethics of being a good man,[59] and how to live the best life possible, a Socratic question previously dealt with by Plato in his Socratic dialogues. Aristotle is not aiming to theorize about the ethics of human life; his goal is create a practical approach to living the ethically best life possible: "Since, then, the present undertaking is not for the sake of theory […] (for we are not inquiring into what excellence is for the sake of knowing it, but for the sake of becoming good […])"[60] The practical approach is what lends Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to use in the context of the process of reading, as reading, like living, is a matter of making conscious and unconscious ethical choices in relation to other beings and phenomenons in the world.

However, the choices made while reading are removed from real life, which will make the process of reaching a decision in ethical questions easier when reading than in reality, as the choices made will not have real consequences for the reader. You can wish the antagonist dead, but unless it is written into the book by the author, your wish will have no real effect on the outcome. It could, however, have real consequences for the literature, as for instance the undermining, judgmental and suppressing treatment of many colonial and postcolonial literatures by the Western cultural hegemony is an example of. That is why it is important to discuss the ethics of reading. The reader cannot change the internal outcome of the story in literature, but as readers of literature our ethical approach and level of awareness is relevant to how literature is interpreted and used in the context of the political and the postcolonial. This is closely related to aesthetics, as I will argue that the aesthetical element in literature is significant to the reader's interpretation and evaluation of a literary work's worldly connection or political relevance.

2.1.1 Eudaimonia

The communal aspect is important in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as the goal is that each will be a better man, ultimately improving the community, as human happiness is both the goal of the individual and of politics:[61] "happiness is some activity of soul in accordance with

[58] Aristotle, *NE*, 4.
[59] Aristotle does not deal with ethics in regards to women.
[60] Aristotle, *NE,* Book II, chapter 2, 1103b30.
[61] Aristotle, *NE,* Book I, chapter 2, 1094b10.

complete excellence",[62] but Aristotle's angle is not utilitarian. The chief good is not that which is given in the largest amount and distributed in the greatest quantity. The greatest of the goods is the good that gives reason to the other goods.[63] Aristotle's approach to the good can be understood as a pyramid, with several fundamental goods, all leading up to the chief good in the peak of the pyramid: *eudaimonia*.

The chief human good is identified as *eudaimonia* and usually translated to "happiness". *Eudaimonia* does not mean "happiness" in the sense it is often used in modern English. It is not a state of mind based on a feeling in relation to specific objects or situations, but rather a state of life. The person who has reached this state of life, has excelled in life: "the *eudaimon*[64] is beyond praise."[65] The road to *eudaimonia* is paved with human goods and excellences.[66] One might feel happy despite being poor or sick or unloved, but that happiness is not *eudaimonia*. One could also feel happy pursuing wealth for the sake of wealth, but that will not lead to true happiness either. To reach *eudaimonia*, one must possess wealth, but know that wealth is not happiness in itself. Aristotle also distinguishes between intellectual excellences and character excellences, and you need both to reach true happiness, because the excellences are what helps you maintain your ethical approach to the material goods. Intellectual excellence is recognized by "good sense, wisdom",[67] character excellence is recognized by good dispositions, "dispositions we praise".[68] Aristotle's dual model of happiness, ensures that to reach the chief human good, it is not enough to possess human goods for utility or pleasure, one must also reach a level of personal excellence, both in intellect and character, to find ethical balance in pursuing and maintaining the human goods, and finally, in reaching the chief human good.

2.1.2 The Golden Mean

The possibly most famous part of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is his theory of the golden mean or middle way.[69] The idea is that the most virtuous, ethical choice or behavior always will be located between two other, more extreme possibilities. If the goal was to be

[62] Aristotle, *NE*, Book I, chapter 13, 1102a5.
[63] Aristotle, *NE*, 10-11.
[64] The adjective version of *eudaimonia.*
[65] Aristotle, *NE*, 12.
[66] Human goods are things like wealth, health, respect, love, beauty. Human excellences are things like courage, honesty, wisdom. Goods are things that can be physically had, excellences are internal human traits that can be trained.
[67] Aristotle, *NE*, Book I, chapter 13, 1103a5-1103a10.
[68] Ibid.
[69] "Golden mean" and "middle way" are two of the most common translations of this aspect of Aristotle's philosophy. I will only use "golden mean" from now on.

courageous, the excess choice would be to be overly fearless, to the point of stupidity. The deficient choice would be to be overly fearful, also to the point of stupidity. The middle way would be combining excess with deficiency, experiencing fear, but managing to overcome it if the situation required it. This position is what Aristotle calls "intermediate", and is the foundation of his theory of the golden mean.[70]

The intermediate position indicates a certain level of contemplation. The subject who finds the middle way, usually will have reflected over his or her options to a greater extent than a subject who exhibits excess or deficiency in the pattern of reaction and behavior, as excess and deficiency often is a sign of instinctual behavior. The logic behind Aristotle's theory of the golden mean is clear; if you contemplate your choice and the consequences it might have before making it, the choice will usually be ethically sounder than if you did not. The golden mean is a theory based on balance, and resembles the Socratic dialogue in that the ideal is to create a contemplative mode that initiates a deeper understanding of the question at hand, and an ability to view it in light of different perspectives. This is why the principle of the golden mean is interesting in the context of reading; it presents the option of reading not *for* a specific goal, be it ideological or aesthetic, but *with* the literature.

Aristotle's ethics are in some ways intuitive; obvious in a sense. The example used above, about courage, speaks to that quality in the ethical treaty. Despite this seemingly intuitive approach to the ethics of human life, the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a complex philosophical work. It consists of many layers, and the summary given in these pages are nothing more than a rough outline. A thorough introduction to the *Nicomachean Ethics* would take up the entire thesis or more, and is therefore not possible to attempt. My main interest in this thesis will be Aristotle's theory of the golden mean and his friendship model, but to give a reasonable portrayal of how the two elements are thought to work, I found it necessary to give a brief summary of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to contextualize, focusing on what I deem to be the central aspects. Without a basic understanding of Aristotle's ethical system, it would be difficult to understand the relevance and significance of the golden mean and friendship to this thesis. In what follows, I will move on to discuss the friendship model in detail.

[70] Aristotle, *NE*, Book III, chapter 6-7, 115a5-116a1.

2.2 The Aristotelian Friendship Model

Aristotle's model of friendship, as described in Books VIII and IX in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is in some respects too archaic to transfer directly to the modern world and modern literature. That is to be expected when dealing with philosophy written over 2000 years ago. One of the aspects of friendship that is not transferable to modern day society is the value ascribed to living together as friends: "For nothing is so characteristic of friends as living together…"[71] This correlates with the notion of geographical distance, as Aristotle assesses that the lack of communication caused by geographical distance can destroy friendships.[72] While friends still sometimes live together, it is no longer considered a necessity. One can be the best of friends, but live separately. The idea of geographical separation has also changed in the modern society; we have new means of communication, making large geographical distances less relevant to friendship. One can maintain friendships with daily conversation across the globe. Human relationships have moved into a different type of communicative space.

Another testimony to the age of the ethical treaty is Aristotle's exclusion of women in his friendship model. He only mentions women briefly in his reflections on friendship within families, where he touches upon the mother-child and husband-wife relation.[73] Friendship, in its optimal form, is first and foremost a relationship between equal *men*, with similar excellences.[74] The question of whether women can have meaningful and good friendships outside the family is never discussed. This can indicate at least two things; either women are not thought able to have good friendships outside the family, or women are included in the friendship model, despite the seemingly conscious and consistent use of gendered personal pronouns, such as "he".[75]

Aristotle distinguishes between three types of friendship: friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure and the good friendship. The utility friendship is based on usefulness; a person involves socially with another to gain something from it.[76] The pleasure friendship is a friendship entirely created to give pleasure to one or both parties, and therefore the love

[71] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 5, 1157b20.
[72] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 5, 1157b10
[73] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 10, 1160b30-1160b35.
[74] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 10, 1160a5-1160a10.
[75] This matter has been widely discussed amongst feminist philosophers, such as in Leah Bradshaw's "Political Rule, Prudence and the Woman Question in Aristotle" (1991), and Darrell Dobbs' "Family Matters: Aristotle's Appreciation of Women and the Plural Structure of Society" (1996).
[76] Aristoteles, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 3, 1156a10-1156a15.

will always be directed at that pleasure, not at the person giving pleasure.[77] The friendship of the good is a friendship between people equal in excellences, where the parties wishes each other good because they are good.[78] In Aristotle's friendship model as well, the theory of the golden mean is present. The good friendship is usually both useful and pleasant, but that is not the motivation behind the friendship, or the reason it continues to exist. The good friendship is both the reason and the goal for two people in a good friendship, and therefore a friendship of good, between good people, is always more likely to last than a friendship of utility or pleasure.[79]

The utility friendship ends as soon as the reason for becoming friends in the first place is dissolved. This would usually be when one or both parties in the friendship have reached the predetermined goal of the friendship, and/or when they are no longer useful to each other. Utility friendships rarely become good friendships.[80] The friendship of pleasure on the other hand, might become a good friendship over time, as the parties could realize there is more to the friend than the pleasure he or she provides. These friendships are often more long lasting than utility friendships, providing the pleasure given is not of unequal importance to the parties. Aristotle uses lovers as an example of this situation, where one of the lovers might take "pleasure in seeing the other, while *he* takes pleasure in being looked after…"[81] The friendship of the good is developed over time: "such friendship also requires time for the parties to grow acquainted with each other's character; for as the proverb has it, people cannot have got to know each other before they have savoured all that salt together…"[82] This type of friendship is less vulnerable to change, distance and time, because it is built on a foundation of *familiarity* and trust.

The Aristotelian friendship model is inherently political, in the sense that "friendship and justice have to do with the same things…",[83] because "there is no need for rules of justice between people who are friends, whereas if they are just they still need friendship – and of what is just, the most just is thought to be what belongs to friendship."[84] Justice is upheld as a central aspect of friendships, in the same way justice is central in democratic

[77] Aristoteles, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 3, 1156a15.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Aristoteles, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 4, 1157a15
[80] Ibid.
[81] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 4, 1157a5-1157a10.
[82] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 3, 1156b25-1156b30.
[83] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 9, 1159b25.
[84] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 1, 1155a25-1155a30.

societies, because democratic societies, like good friendships, do not "seek the advantage of the moment, but takes regard to the whole life…"[85]

The argumentation gets abstract when Aristotle discusses the correlation between friendship and politics, and it is difficult to provide examples from the *Nicomachean Ethics* that illustrates how he thinks the two related to each other, because it is never directly expressed; only illustrated in thought experiments. However, my interpretation of Aristotle's argumentation regarding the relationship between friendship and politics is that friendship and politics in Aristotle's ethics are tied together by the ideal of justice as a consequence of sameness. In an ideal, completely ethical society, where all people have reached *eudaimonia* and therefore is equal (the same), there is no need for rules of justice. The society will self-regulate and be completely free from crime and injustice, because everyone is equal and have the same amount of excellence. In a society or friendship of inequality such as the friendship of utility or of pleasure, problems related to justice will arise, because the friendship or society is not founded on just equality built on sameness/familiarity.

That is why ethics is preliminary to politics in the Aristotelian ethics; in a society where all subjects are ethically good and all friendships therefore are good as well, political struggles for distribution and power becomes superfluous, because all interhuman relationships within the ideal society is built on equality and respect. The society will self-regulate completely, there will be no need for laws or a justice system, because every subject has reached eudaimonia. The friendship of pleasure and the friendship of utility, two clearly political forms of human interaction in that they are related to power and personal gain, will be non-existent in this ideal society, and so the struggle for distribution of power and goods will be made extinct. However, a different form of politics, a form that Aristotle does not deal directly with, appears in the wake of the struggle for power and goods, and that is *the distribution of the perceptible*. This form of political activity will be discussed in depth in the later section on Ranciere's political philosophy.

Aristotle continues this strain of thought by analyzing different power relations, both in political systems and in families, comparing each to his model of friendship.[86] As a result, it is shown that one does not have to be equal in standing to be friends; a father can be a friend to his son, despite the unequal power relation, that according to Aristotle resembles that of a king to his subjects.[87] Inequality in social standing can be undermined by justice and

[85] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 9, 1160a20-1160a25.
[86] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 11, 1161a10.
[87] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 11, 1161a20.

equality; if the father treats his son justly, and the son acknowledges the inequality in standing and excellence, and pays justice and respect to his father in the amount the inequality demands, they can form a good friendship based on equality. These types of friendships are possible because humbleness, respect and other character traits a son is expected to show his father, or a subject to his king, are also human excellences. If the father is a wise and just man, and the son is humble and respectful, they have equality in excellence in regards to each other, and their friendship is a good one.[88]

However, Aristotle's possibility of friendship between different people, as exemplified above, does not provide a solution to the problem of how difference can be treated justly. That problem is relevant to the question of postcolonial aesthetics and politics, as the postcolonial struggle for equality is based on a claim for justice, not because of difference, but despite difference. The example from the *Nicomachean Ethics* provided above, of how a good friendship of difference can be formed, where the son is to treat his father like a subject treats his king, reads like a colonialist's hand book from the 19th century in the context of the anti-colonial struggle for equality. In a later segment in this chapter, Jacques Derrida's problematization of the exclusion of difference as starting point for a good, equal friendship in the Aristotelian friendship model will be accounted for.

2.2.1 Egotism and Altruism

The question of egotism and altruism is at the heart of the Aristotelian friendship model. Both friendships of pleasure and friendships of utility are considered egotistical friendships; this is apparent because both of the types of friendships are formed on the foundation of personal gain. The good friendship can never be based on egotism, simply because that would not be a good friendship, it would be one of utility or pleasure. However, the good friendship is not easy to achieve, as you not only have to find your equal and develop a relationship to the person over time.

To have a truly good friendship, it is also, according to Aristotle, necessary to know yourself: "The features of typical friendship for others, and those by which the kind of friendship are defined, seem to derive from aspects of our relationship towards ourselves."[89] This implies that a certain level of self-awareness is necessary to acquire and maintain a good friendship, as what a bad person often lacks is the ability to see the causality of her actions. This means that a good friendship almost exclusively happens between good people, because

[88] Aristotle, *NE*, Book VIII, chapter 12, 1162a1-1162a10.
[89] Aristotle, *NE*, Book IX, chapter 4, 1166a1.

the good people, in addition to human excellences and goods, have the ability to see all the goods a good friendship might give:

> For this sort makes the same judgment as himself, and desires the same things in respect of his whole soul: and he certainly wishes for what is good for himself, and what appears good, and he does it (for it is a mark of a good person to work hard at what is good), and for his own sake (for he does it for the sake of the thinking element of himself, which is what each of us is thought to be).[90]

The altruist has good friendships, because he sees that they are good, both for himself and for the other party, "for his friend is another self"[91] and "friendship in its superior form resembles one's love for oneself."[92]

A good person must love herself, because it will inspire the person to continue doing what is good, and what is good for the good person, will be good for others.[93] The good person will recognize his/her goods, and attempt to extend that good to others. An egoist does not intend to extend goods to others, but to acquire them by means of others, and then keep them to herself. The altruism in Aristotle's ethics is thus not a structural one, meaning that it is not the primary goal of his philosophy; it is rather a consequence of his approach to the practical ethics of living. That is how Aristotle distinguishes between good and bad, altruism and egotism, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The Aristotelian model for good friendship is about equality, about giving and receiving justice, and about realizing that when you give to a good friend, you are also giving to yourself. Within the field of literature studies and theory, these are all perspectives that have been, and still are, up for discussion. Questions about the literary canon, about which authors and what kind of literature are traditionally canonized, are directly relatable to questions about equality and justice. Reader-response theories often view the reading experience as a dialogue between the reader and the text, implying a mode of mutual giving and receiving. The Aristotelian friendship model is about co-existing in an ethically good way, about treating others with respect and goodness, and due to the humanistic nature of the ethical theory it is not hard to find traces of it in the literary field. It is natural to strive to be ethically sound when dealing with others, whether it is directly or with their literary work,

[90] Aristotle, *NE*, Book IX, chapter 4, 1166a15-1166a20.
[91] Aristotle, *NE*, Book IX, chapter 4, 1166a30.
[92] Aristotle, *NE*, Book IX, chapter 4, 1166b1.
[93] Aristotle, *NE*, Book IX, chapter 8, 1169a10-1169a15.

and to achieve that it is necessary to form a bond of intimacy with the subject or object in question. Geographical or emotional distance is a threat to good friendship in the Aristotelian friendship model, and should perhaps be treated as equally threatening to an ethically sound approach to literature, because physical or mental distance can limit the ability to experience *with* a fictional world. What remains to be discussed is how (and if) the literary field can succeed in the ethical approach to literature, especially in dealing with postcolonial literatures, where the idea of difference and otherness makes the possibility of justice through equality as sameness, impossible.

It is therefore necessary to find another way of approaching the postcolonial literary production, in this instance *Their Eyes*, which is not based on the Aristotelian understanding of difference as impossible to reach, in a manner that allows for a good friendship to be formed. My hypothesis is that it is in the aesthetics of *Their Eyes* that the possibility of a 'friendship' is located, as the readerly imagination is activated in the novel's aesthetical sphere. By using the aesthetic and the imaginative, rather than the political or ideological, as points of access to the literary world of *Their Eyes*, the reader is allowed to free herself from the real world politics of the postcolonial, and by doing so the political aspects might become even clearer, as she emerges from the aesthetic sphere of the novel. By letting the imagination invoke *compassion* through the aesthetic,[94] the political elements that ties the literary work to the real world can become a second reality to the reader, *experienced as such*, rather than an ideological battle that is based on a history of suppression that is learnt but not experienced,[95] and thus is located at a distance from the readerly self.

2.3 Jacques Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship*

In *The Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida employs the deconstructive method on the structure and the historical development of the idea of friendship. The development is traced through a variety of philosophers like Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche, Montaigne, etc. The inquiry's starting point is a quote that Montaigne attributed to Aristotle: "O my friends, there is no friend."[96] Derrida then moves on to discuss Cicero's definition of a good friend. Cicero, like Aristotle, based good friendship on sameness. The best friend in both Aristotle and

[94] This will be further discussed in chapter three in the segment on Martha C. Nussbaum's *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*.
[95] Experience does not mean 'understand', and is not meant to invoke 'understood'. There is a significant difference in the way these two words are used throughout the thesis, and the one must not be confused with the other.
[96] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, Politiques De L'amitié (London: Verso, 1997), 1.

Cicero's treaties on friendship is the "ideal double",[97] and it is this concept of sameness as a necessary foundation for friendship Derrida sets out to challenge:

> Beyond death, the absolute future thus receives its ecstatic light, it appears only from within this narcissism and according to this logic of the same. (It will not suffice to claim exactly the contrary, as we will attempt to do, in order to provide a logical demonstration, in a decidable discourse; another way and another thought will be necessary for the task.)[98]

By claiming "exactly the contrary" to Cicero's ideal friendship of sameness, Derrida is professing a friendship of otherness, a development of the idea of friendship that might prove helpful when dealing with postcolonial literature, such as *Their Eyes*. This contradiction lays the foundation for the development of the term *teleiopoesis*, in the second chapter of *The Politics of Friendship*, a neologism designed to describe how a friendship of otherness rather than sameness can, in a different manner and possibly even stronger, provide the same movement "beyond life",[99] an "ecstasy towards a future which will go beyond death."[100] *Teleiopoesis* thus takes form as an *event* of possibility of hope and future, of the coming, through friendship with the other.

Derrida furthers the reach of the Aristotelian friendship model, making possible friendships that Aristotle deem impossible. In Aristotle's philosophy of friendship, good friendship between people of great difference is very hard to obtain, if not impossible, because what is good is the same in all people. Courage or wisdom might be expressed differently in different people depending on situation and personality, but the good virtue is good in the same way in all human beings. Thus, difference in the Aristotelian friendship model can only entail difference in goodness or badness. This creates a one-dimensional model of friendship, where good and bad can be measured, and friendships should be formed on the basis of the results, to avoid inequality and ensure the friendship is good. The idea of sameness is at the heart of the Aristotelian friendship model, because sameness is what makes equality possible. The sameness might be based on familiarity or fraternity, filiation or affiliation, but no matter where the sameness stems from, it is a necessity to achieve balance in the relationship between friends.

This notion of sameness as a basic necessity in the formation of friendship, as expressed in Aristotle's books on friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, has haunted Western

[97] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 4.
[98] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 4.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 3-4.

politics and philosophy for more than 2000 years, and is what Derrida wishes to examine and contest in *The Politics of Friendship*. He is dealing with the "ghostly apparition"[101] of the narcissistic ideal of friendship, manifested in a hope that through sameness, we can gain access to a life beyond death, become eternally represented amongst the living by the equal friend who lives her life to achieve the goal of sameness to the historical friends who have passed before her.[102]

The pairing of sameness and equality in Aristotle's friendship model creates an opposite pair: difference and inequality, insinuating that equality is impossible where difference is present. The same dichotomy is, according to Derrida, a force in modern democracy, and the political world in general, where the power of the majority creates an illusion of equality by claiming to represent every singular subject *and* social group in a given society, but forgetting the importance of power relations between the different social groups in that society. Politics is, by traditional definition, about distributing goods, but the goods are not infinite. For someone to receive, others will have to concede, and the reality is that some social groups are more likely to be on the receiving end than others. This dynamic can be tied to sameness, as history shows we are more likely to give to one who is considered 'our own' than to an unknown or different. The dichotomy is therefore an incentive to sameness, as it more often than not will be most profitable to be part of the majority, which is likely to win through with their claims. Also, a large majority is seen as indicative of a large amount of sameness, and thus a large amount of equality, contributing to the idea of the modern democracy as a political system of good virtue.

Derrida presents this paradox of democracy; the impossibility of reconciling the proclaimed respect for the singular subject's right to equality, which is the democratic model's founding virtue, and the "community of friends",[103] the social groups actively participating in the economy of majority in a democratic society. One cannot represent every singular subject, to achieve that, every singular subject would have to represent themselves. The economy of the majority ensures that those who are greatest in number are given the most power.[104] Once again this shows how powerful the principle of sameness is in the modern democracy. In the economy of the majority, joining the largest majority – becoming the same – will always be the most profitable choice in regards to the democratic distribution

[101] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 3.
[102] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 3-4.
[103] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 22.
[104] Ibid.

of power. To be on the winning end of democracy, it is necessary to "count one's friends"[105] and to "count the others"[106], strengthening the dichotomous gap between those who are friends/same and those who are other/different. In Aristotle's friendship model, the primary goal of friendship is balance, just as the primary goal of the democracy is stability. The question is what price we are paying for that stability, and who is paying it. Derrida's answer to that question seems to be "the others",[107] those who are not part of a majority; those who represent difference and therefore are a threat to the democratic stability.

2.3.1 *Teleiopoesis*

This is why Derrida comes up with the term *teleiopoesis.* Democracy is commonly regarded the best possible way of governing a country, but it is flawed, because it always favors those who are many and the same, and therefore thought immanently equal. *Teleiopoesis* is not first and foremost a suggestion of how to rule a nation, but an inquiry into how one individual can break the tradition of sameness, and approach an individual of difference. It is a philosophical term that could have an impact on micro levels, in relationships between singular subjects, but because friendship, ethics and politics, in both Aristotle and Derrida's understanding, is closely interwoven through ideas of justice and equality, it also signifies a potentiality of going beyond the singular subjects, without losing sight of those singular subjects in the grey masses of majority.

> We are speaking about anything but narcissism as it is commonly understood: Echo, the possible Echo, she who speaks from, and steal, the words of the other [celle qui prend la parole aux mots de l'autre], she who takes the other at his or her word, her very freedom preceding the first syllables of Narcissus, his mourning and his grief. We are speaking of anything but the exemplarity of the Ciceronian *exemplar*. An arch-friendship would inscribe itself on the surface of the testament's seal. It would call for the last word of the last will and testament. But in advance it would carry it away as well. It would be extraneous neither to the other justice nor to the other politics whose possibility we would like, perhaps, to see announced here. Through, perhaps, *another experience of the possible*. (emphasis added)[108]

This "other experience of the possible"[109] is what the singular subject might reach through ethical, good friendship with an other. It is also described as "[t]he *horizon*", which "is the limit *and* the absence of limit, the loss of the horizon, the ahorizontality of the horizon, the

[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 24.
[109] Ibid.

limit as absence of limit."[110] Friendship outside the framework of sameness presents a new possibility, a potential that does not exist within the Aristotelian friendship model, where the principle of sameness restricts the possibility of transgressing the borders of this sameness, in fear of what one might discover beyond the horizon of sameness. There, equality is something that has to be strived for, not considered a necessary consequence of the stipulations for a good friendship.

Gayatri Spivak uses the neologism in *Harlem* (2013), where she describes the activity of *teleiopoesis* as "a reaching toward the distant other by the patient power of the imagination, a curious kind of identity politics, where one crosses identity, as a result of migration or exile."[111] The idea of an exiled position as a good position for a postcolonial study of a foreign culture is as old as the postcolonial field itself. Edward Said, by many considered a founding father of the theoretical field, wrote about the idea, calling it "secular criticism", in 1983.[112] Derrida develops this thought into something that can happen through the concept of friendship, something that can be achieved by assuming a certain position in relation to history, society, the self and the other. The position is of the friend, the one who takes interest and tries to understand each event not from her own I, but from the friends I.

In a friendship of sameness, the act of understanding the friend begins and ends with understanding yourself in stability. In a friendship of otherness, a *teleiopoetic* friendship, one must destroy the stability and transgress the personal I to reach the friend's horizon. It is "the patient power of imagination",[113] not familiarity or fraternity that makes a friendship of *teleiopoesis* possible. *Teleiopoesis* describes the "friends of perhaps",[114] the friends that is only a possibility, and must remain that way, because the instability of the perhaps is what makes it possible. One cannot secure a *teleiopoetic* friendship; it would cause the subject to withdraw from the "changing place"[115] and return to the stable I, where sameness once again will be the governing principle of friendship.

The *teleiopoetic* friendship is a fourth form of friendship, added by Derrida, in the Aristotelian friendship model. The good, or the "primary friendship",[116] as Derrida calls it,[117]

[110] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 12.
[111] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Harlem," *Social Text* 22, no. 4 [81] (2004): 116. This citation was found in an earlier, shorter edition of *Harlem*, published as an article. The citation can however also be found in the 2013 book.
[112] Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).
[113] Spivak, "Harlem", 116.
[114] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship,* 43.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 23.

is the only form of friendship that is stable. Both the friendship of pleasure and the friendship of utility are unstable, because they are not based on virtue and equality. The instability of these two original forms of friendship are inherently negative, because the instability is caused by a difference that usually is known to one or both parties, intending to use that difference to gain something concrete from the friendship. Derrida's addition to Aristotle's friendship model appears to be mimicking the very foundation of Aristotle's ethics.

The *teleiopoetic* friendship is a golden mean between the good friendship and those of pleasure or utility, needing the instability of the two last mentioned to reach the virtuous state of the first. Virtuous not meaning 'equal in virtue', but rather *open*, with the subject in the "changing place";[118] ready to cross over into the disappearing horizon of the other. Virtue, in the *teleiopoetic* friendship, is the ability to let oneself be freed from the narcissistic bounds of sameness, daring to move beyond the stability of the imagined equal, and rather imagine a difference that is not impossible to reach and not only interesting from a perspective of personal gain. Not immanently unequal, but a potential, a glimpse into what could be, a "condition of possibility and describing it not as a formal structure, but – here, in any case – as a sort of existential opening…"[119] The *teleiopoetic* friendship is an opportunity to reach and understand the different/other, without losing the possibility of equality.

This is what makes Derrida's addition to the Aristotelian friendship model useful in the study of postcolonial literature; it creates an opening, a potential, to reach out to the other and be the good friend who strives for equality, not meaning sameness, but a combination of justice and respect similar to what we know as equality, despite the presence of difference. The imaginative process entailed in reaching this particular subject position is always already activated while reading, especially when reading fiction, because fiction implies imagination on side of the author, and therefore, to a greater extent than when reading something that claims to be completely true and real, also in the reader. The challenge is to broaden the reach of the imagination beyond one's own cultural, ethnic and religious identity. It is easy to come along for a fictional journey as a tourist in an imagined landscape of difference. What *teleiopoesis* demands is the difficult task of leaving the safe and familiar grounds of personal identity behind, in hope of crossing the borders into the unknown without the mindset of the tourist, without a return ticket as a constant reminder of the familiar home, built on a foundation of sameness.

---

[117] Derrida is using a different translation of the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Good friendship and primary friendship is the same type of friendship.
[118] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 43.
[119] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 17.

The *teleiopoetic* friendship is a way of living; it is a suggestion of how to, practically, reach the other. It has to be; otherwise it would not fit into the Aristotelian friendship model, which aim is, as mentioned in the previous segment on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, to provide a practical approach to the ethics of life. In section 2.4 "Difference and Intimacy" the possibility of using the Aristotelian friendship model, with Derrida's added *teleiopoetic* friendship, as a reading strategy or interpretive mode will be discussed in depth.

2.4 Difference and Intimacy: The Aristotelian Model of Friendship as a Reading Strategy

The Aristotelian friendship model has limitations that are difficult to overcome when applying it as a reading strategy or interpretive mode for the purpose of reading postcolonial literature. Some of the limitations are caused by the fact that it was developed over 2000 years ago, in a society and a world very different from the present, and some of the limitations are caused by the old, but still familiar idea of sameness as necessary for good interpersonal relationships and, as a result of the established connection between friendship and politics, a good and just governing of a country. These limitations are what Derrida deals with in his *Politics of Friendship.*

In light of the previous segments on Aristotle's friendship model as described in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Jacques Derrida's further development of that same model in *The Politics of Friendship*, I will attempt to outline an ethical reading strategy that will be employed in the later chapters on the politics of reading and the analysis of *Their Eyes*. The ethics of this reading strategy is not to focus on ethics as such, but to examine how the difficult relationship between aesthetics and politics in the scholarly discourse on *Their Eyes* can be resolved by combining the two in a reading that is not aimed at a particular ideological or aesthetical result, but rather an imagination-driven experience of the literature in itself, that can awaken a political awareness that is not only ideological, but ethical and compassionate. By employing this method of approach I hope to find a golden mean between aesthetics and politics in the postcolonial discourse, by showing that combining the two reading orientations can actually emphasize the respective perspectives.

Even though Derrida approaches the friendship model on the same terms Aristotle did, with the idea of creating a *practical* possibility of reaching the other through the *teleiopoetic* friendship, the level of abstraction in *The Politics of Friendship* makes it difficult to discern exactly how the process of *teleiopoesis* should be conducted. What is clear, is that

is has to do with imagination; that the specific subject position that makes the reaching of the other possible is an imagined one. The abstract nature of *teleiopoesis* is necessary in Derrida's approach, because he is criticizing the underlying universalism of the Aristotelian friendship model, more specifically the claim that all men can reach the greatest good if they employ a specific ethical method to do so. Derrida cannot give an answer or a formula on how to reach the other, as that would make his contribution to the friendship model just as centered on the idea of sameness as the Aristotelian model that he is criticizing, because it would suggest that the method is the same for everybody attempting it.

The fact that the *teleiopoetic* friendship is imagined means that it is impossible to physically achieve, but that does not mean that it cannot be done. The inherent impossibility is in a sense what makes it possible, as the impossible-possible, a thought figure Derrida has employed several times in other philosophical works, signifies the potentiality in thinking. Many things are thought impossible, but it is actually *in thought* that they are possible. That you cannot *do* something does not mean that you cannot think it. The idea of sameness is just that – an *idea* – and it is also historical evidence that if you can think it, doing it is made possible through the act of thinking. The idea of sameness was thought up at some point in history, and as a consequence, difference and equality have been thought an impossible pair, as it would destroy the binary pattern of thought and language on which we have based our understanding of society and history, the self and the other. The impossible-possible destabilizes the foundation for understanding the basic concepts of the world, and shows how important the logocentric language has been in the development of the modern conceptions of the possible.

Teleiopoesis is a method because it is a suggestion of how to reach the other in practical terms, but it constitutes an internal process that is hard to convey in language. That is, of course, done entirely on purpose by Derrida, because the intention to deconstruct the familiarity with which we normally use language in many ways has defined Derrida's philosophical career. However, to progress in this line of thought it is necessary to move beyond the internal process of *teleiopoesis*, onto a level where it is possible to describe the activity with language. That is why the Aristotelian friendship model is important in this regard. The Aristotelian friendship model provides the tools to understand what one is leaving behind when one enters into a *teleiopoetic* friendship, and when transgressing a border or a horizon it is just as important to know what you are transgressing, as where you are transgressing.

What we are attempting to leave behind, is the idea that equality is impossible without sameness. By entering into the *teleiopoetic* process, we are committing not to an ideological interpretation that can tie *Their Eyes,* or any other postcolonial work, to the real world of democracy and justice, and thereby make political claims for equality. As readers, we should rather commit to a process and an experience that can provide new perspectives, compassion and reflection, *openness*. By allowing the combination of aesthetics and politics to continue collaborating and exchanging, we may reach the point where justice and equality is no longer a possibility or a goal, but inherent in the experience. For readers affiliated to the European literary tradition and hegemony, reading postcolonial literature, what may be most difficult is moving beyond the fear of colonizing the postcolonial work. By untying the bonds to the political sphere and allowing the imagination to take charge in the reading process, it becomes less difficult to experience literature as art in full. The hypothesis is that such a reading position, one that is freed from the immediate pressure of politics and not constantly drawn back into the real world by the demand for participation in political struggle, can experience and come to respect the literary work in a way that is impossible if the reading is already tied to ideology before it has even begun. If the reader enters into the literary work by way of aesthetics, the openness that is required to achieve a *teleiopoetic* friendship, a friendship in process rather than stability, will be intact. Ideology closes the door for openness, because ideology is aimed at utility, at gained specific insights or knowledge and *using* the knowledge to further a cause. By remaining open as readers, we strengthen the democratic potential of literature, because we allow more voices within the literary work to be heard. This particular notion will be further discuss in the segment on literature and democracy in chapter three.

It must be emphasized that this is only an outline or a sketch of what is to be the method of the study of *Their Eyes* that is to follow. There might have to be made changes along the way, as there is no certain way of knowing that what has been thought in the previous will actually work in what is to follow. What does it mean to be a good friend to a novel? And what are the ethical and political implications and consequences if one reads for utility or pleasure, especially when reading postcolonial literature that might be located far away from the reader's own experiences and reality? These questions have to do with representation through interpretation; every study of a novel projects an image of the world of the novel onto a discourse, creating a representation of that novelistic world. When working with a postcolonial novel which springs from an unfamiliar social, historical, religious and racial context and it may not be enough to meet the text half way, as that can

entail a ethically and politically problematic rewriting of the text, which might have been consciously or unconsciously activated in the reader to make the text more familiar and useful to him/her and the academic discourse.

This is why the postcolonial politics of the literary field is problematized in this thesis. The postcolonial discourse is in a position where the literary criticism is often done for mainly ideological reasons. The aesthetics of the postcolonial is rarely given attention or attributed value, because it is not clear how such an orientation can participate and contribute to the overall political struggle for justice and equality.[120] In what follows, I will argue that the postcolonial discourse's misgivings about the aesthetical is based on prejudices about what a aesthetical orientation is and entails in the reading of a literary work, and strive to show how the aesthetics of *Their Eyes* is directly connected to the novel's political project. The ties between the political and the aesthetical is necessary for democracy, and this line of argumentation will be further developed in chapter three, especially in the segments on Jacques Ranciére and postcolonial aesthetics.

[120] Elleke Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic: Repeating Upon the Present" in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millenium* (London: Routledge: 2010), ed. Janet Wilson, *et al*.

3 The Politics of Reading: Democracy, Aesthetics and the Postcolonial

There are many ways of reading, many theories of how to read and how we read. This chapter will concern itself with *who* can read and *why* we should read. It deals with questions of how literature and democracy is connected, and presents perspectives on postcolonial aesthetics that is useful to the overall topic of the thesis. Also, the problems related to egalitarianism, universal equality, will be examined in relation to the postcolonial and the concept of difference and minority.

3.1 The Fear of Reading

> I should have liked to write about the work of Toni Morrison, about her inscription of the constant dis-placement which is the condition of African-American, […] I should have liked to treat her invocation of the unhomely, and das Unheimliche, in the stories she tells of what for black Americans constitutes and fails to constitute – home. […] I should have liked to do all this, but I have a fear of appearing to colonize her work.[121]

The fear expressed by Catherine Belsey in the above quote touches on a question at the very core of our discipline. The question is how should we read, how can we read, and more specifically: how can we read literature from other, unfamiliar cultures? The study of literature is not a positivist science, and consequently there are no clear rights or wrongs in dealing with the question of how to read. However, not reading does not seem like a good answer to the problem posed by Belsey. By not reading literature from other cultures, we are not only denying ourselves the opportunity to discover previously unknown authors and texts that can enrich our understanding of literature as a whole, but we are also rejecting the opportunity to learn something about the culture that is implied in the literary work. Another possible consequence of walling off the literatures from unfamiliar cultures is the continued cementation of the Eurocentric hegemony. The act of denying ourselves to read denies the literature to be read. This does not mean that it is not read, the European and Anglo-American[122] literary scholars are not the only ones that are capable of reading, but the European and Anglo-American literary scholars are still controlling the literary canon. What

[121] Catherine Belsey, *Desire. Love Stories in Western Culture* (Oxford & Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994), 92.
[122] "Anglo-American" may refer to several different social, geographical and cultural combinations related North America, but also to the relationship between North America and Great Britain. In what follows, the word will always refer to the English speaking North America.

is read and appreciated by this particular group is what is canonized. Not reading literature from unfamiliar cultures will not improve on the situation.

That does not mean that reading is unproblematic. The history of our discipline show that reading is the exact opposite of unproblematic, and reading authors and texts from unfamiliar cultures have proven to be one of the most difficult tasks the study of literature has been faced with since it was established as a university degree in the nineteenth century. However, as Gayatri Spivak polemically expressed in her pamphlet *Death of a Discipline*, whether or not we find a solution to the question of how to read literature from unfamiliar cultures might determine if the study of literature can survive as the process of globalization continues to move the epicenter of human development, culture and industry further away from the European and Anglo-American cultural comfort zone.[123]

Not to read should not be an option at this point in time, as the export and import of foreign cultural expressions is increasing, partly due to migration and increased tourism to parts of the world that previously were only visited by explorers, archeologists, anthropologists and others with particular career related reasons to travel there, and partly due to the internet's never ending transmission of pictures, movies, news and other texts from all around the world. As a result of the intensified exposure to cultures formerly only partially reachable through second or third hand experience to the average person,[124] the world and the people inhabiting it should be becoming less mysterious and exotic, not only to Europeans and Anglo-Americans, but also to those previously excluded from the European and Anglo-American social, cultural and geographical sphere.

The position on the cultural effects of globalization presented above is fairly common, and it is, to some extent, a factual one. However, when reviewing the consequences of globalization in light of the previous theoretical excursions on the *teleiopoetic* friendship, a nuancing of the position appears necessary. There are many factors involved in the process of globalization, and even more in the presentation and interpretation of transmissions of foreign media and text we are exposed to on a daily basis in the globalized world. Taking them all into account is impossible, but some, like access to communication technology, language skills and literacy, are of great significance when

[123] Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 15.
[124] News and details from unknown areas of the world were usually reported through handed down stories, travel journals later edited and published, and travel literature. The two last mentioned was highly popular literary genres, especially in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, where books like *Captain Cooks Journals* (1784) is an example of autobiographical travel literature and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is an example of travel fiction that both became bestsellers.

discussing the idea of an unconditional egalitarian democracy where all groups and subjects are (re)presented.

The globalized world and especially the effects of the Internet gives the impression of a worldwide unity, a closeness and sameness that springs from the technological revolution and have the potential to give everyone a voice. That may to some degree be accurate, but globalization has also brought about a need to think what we used to understand as different closer to our own reality. What used to be unreachable suddenly seems reachable through images and text, personal profiles and news, giving those of us who have access to the necessary tools a previously unimaginable glimpse into the difference, allowing us to imagine a familiarity that might not be real. Moving on, it is necessary to be aware of the fallacy hidden in this assumption, as it entails the danger of imagining a worldwide egalitarian unity, sameness and equality that might diminish the importance of experiencing what is different as different, not as a different expression of the same.

The Internet appeals to the democratic egalitarian ideal, giving its users a feeling of broad and diverse inclusion and a radical freedom of speech. However, that is a truth in need of significant modification, as the different voices we are hearing on the Internet are the voices of people with education and means, people with different cultural identities, but who all the same are a part of the technological cultural structure that ties the developed world together, and who modifies the reality of their difference to partake in the mother tongue of the Internet; Brief, and English. This analysis could go on to become an entire master thesis on its own; hence it is inevitable that it is lacking perspectives that could nuance it further, but as the vantage point here is the question of how to read literature from different, unfamiliar cultures, it is necessary to return to that vantage point and see how the analysis of the globalized means of communication can affect the further work with that question.

In light of the many difficulties related to understanding how difference is expressed and understood in the modern world, Belsey's fear of reading is understandable. In fact, in her own words, her fear is not reading, but "appearing to colonize her [Toni Morrison's] work."[125] That fear of colonizing is expressed in the act of not reading, in making a conscious choice to avoid literature that presumably cannot be read through the filters of European and Anglo-American culture and history. Perhaps the most interesting word in Belsey's statement is "appearing". She is afraid of *appearing* to colonize. What does that

[125] Belsey, *Desire*, 92.

really mean? It sounds like what she is afraid of is not of actually colonizing Toni Morrison's literary work, but of being interpreted as a colonizer of Toni Morrison's literary work. To be a colonialist and to be interpreted as a colonialist is two very different positions to be in. If you are a colonialist, you are in a stable, self-aware situation of colonizing, you are performing the act of colonizing without shame, or you are doing it without the self-awareness, but doing it to a degree where the colonizing is blatantly obvious to anyone reviewing your work. Very few discuss whether the English were colonialists in the nineteenth century, as it is close to impossible to interpret their actions as anything but the actions of colonialists. When you *appear* to be colonizing however, the situation is far from clear, and when you *fear appearing* to be colonizing it becomes very complex.

Catherine Belsey's statement is from 1994, a point in time when the postcolonial field was expanding, reviewing the literary canon, criticizing the way the field had been reading and interpreting literature, pointing out injustices done to literature from unfamiliar cultures, and directing attention to how both the writing and the study of literature had contributed to the construction of the great Western narrative. The postcolonial voice had grown much stronger in a few decades, and their points of view had to be taken in to account when working with literature, even if you were not a postcolonial scholar.

When Belsey expresses a fear of *appearing* to colonize, the choice of wording may be largely due to the fact that the postcolonial field had managed to put pressure on the more traditional approach to literature by problematizing the foundation it was built on. Reading has become even more complicated, both to understand and perform, in the wake of the development of the postcolonial field, because the postcolonial theory movement has placed the entire history and praxis of the study of literature under scrutiny. Belsey's fear of *appearing* to colonize should probably be understood in accordance with the postcolonial problematization of the act of reading. Her point of view is that of the apologetic Westerner, accepting blame for the suppression and injustice done to the victims of colonization and racism on behalf of the West, but at the same time, with the word "appearing", partially disqualifying the acceptance of blame by insinuating that the act of colonizing is open for interpretation, and that her hypothetical reading of Toni Morrison's literary work might not have been colonialist, but could be interpreted as such with a certain kind of political motivation driving the interpretation.

Implied in Catherine Belsey's short sentence is a political question that has been and still is central to the entire field of literary study. Actually it is not only a political question, but also an ethical and political struggle. It revolves around the question of how to read, but

does also close in on an idea of *who* can read. This is where the issue gets truly problematic, as the idea that certain people should not or cannot read certain types of literature threatens to establish a literary border between the West and the non-West, a border that segregates on the basis of cultural and geographical belonging, making the determining factor in the answer to the question of what one should read dependent on the reader's birthplace, religious views, cultural ties, etc. It is possible that Belsey was not aware of the many philosophically challenging implications entailed in her brief remark; her intentions might purely have been to express a grievance that she did not feel qualified to write about an author she very much would have liked to write about. Never the less, her remark expresses a fear that should be taken seriously and analyzed in the context of the postcolonial.

Postcolonial theory has drawn attention to discrimination and injustice, to the power structures and cultural hegemony that have shaped the field of literary studies. It has put forward a necessary and important incentive to reevaluate the way we read, interpret and value literature. It has opened the field up to new ideas, generated debate and development, and exposed weaknesses and fallacies in the historical web of tradition that have shaped the strategies we employ when we approach our object of study – literature. There should be no doubt that the postcolonial movement has been ground breaking and crucial to the further development of the study of literature. However, the pressure it has put on the field to move beyond what is familiar, both object of study and method of study, may have resulted in a tension that is not serving the postcolonial interest.

Many postcolonial theories and theoreticians have a deconstructive heritage, as they are looking to deconstruct and expand the way in which we construct and understand social and cultural structures, and our academic discipline. This is an important step towards understanding how both the European and Anglo-American culture, and the cultures that is not a part of what is called "the West" socially, politically and culturally has been constructed by those with the power to shape history. By deconstructing the Western self-image, including the traditional Western understanding of history, society, culture and politics, postcolonial theory is making it possible to reexamine our history, both that of the West and that of our discipline. However, a problem arises when scholars are expressing a fear of doing their job; interpreting literature, because the postcolonial tension related to certain works of literature is so powerful that they become almost inaccessible to scholars of Western heritage and academic background. That development is in no one's best interest, because it establishes an idea of literature as belonging to the persons or the social groups that is most equipped to understand it correctly, which in itself is a problematic idea, as it is

very difficult, if not impossible, to determine what is the correct understanding of a work of fiction. The conception that literature belongs to those who have the cultural background and knowledge to fully 'understand it', and that it should only be read in the context of its own cultural belonging is very limiting to the study of literature, and destroys the potential of cultural exchange that literature otherwise can offer. It makes the process of reaching the unknown through the imagination, and thereby learning something from it, impossible.

Feminism and postcolonialism have been much compared and combined in the literary field, as they are both associated with the struggle against suppression. Feminists are still discussing whether men can and should be allowed to declare themselves feminist and join the movement, and both men and women are hesitating to identify with the term.[126] There could be many reasons for this, but one of them might be that feminism has alienated itself from the reality of most people. There is no doubt that the movement was, and still is, much needed, but it appears that feminism for many have come to represent a radical political group that both genders are struggling to identify with. Postcolonialism and feminism are philosophical movements with political agendas, and they have both to some degree relied on a certain shock effect[127] to get their message through, a necessary strategy when you are, as both feminism and postcolonialism are, trying to change a structure that is deeply rooted in the foundation of modern society. The challenge with the approach is that it may result in giving someone who could have been useful to the cause, and vice versa, a sense of exclusion, as one can see from the statistics on how few women actually identify as feminists in the USA.

On that basis one could speculate on Catherine Belsey's position. There is a possibility that she may have had something interesting and important to say about Toni Morrison's literary work, but because she does not feel that she belongs to the particular group that postcolonialism is driven by and aimed at, she excluded herself in fear of being excluded by those who control the postcolonial discourse. This is of course only a speculation, and the claim will have to be further explored and nuanced.

The mechanism of inclusion and exclusion is closely tied to distribution of power, and therefore by default related to the previous discussion of modern democracy. If the postcolonial discourse in reality has the power to exclude, that would imply that there has

[126] Alyssa N. Sucker, "Disavowing Social Identities: What it Means When Women Say 'I'm Not a Feminist, but…'", *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (28:2004), 423-35.; Shawn Meghan Burn, *et al.,* "The Relationship Between Gender, Social Identity and Support for Feminism", *Sex Roles* (42:2000), 1081-89.
[127] The deconstruction of tradition and history can be shocking enough to some, but especially feminism has also employed activist means like varying forms of demonstrations and campaigns to gain media attention for their cause.

been a shift in the general democratic distribution of power, as the postcolonial discourse represents those social and cultural groups that used to be in minority. The minority groups needed voices to express their opinions and needs, and the postcolonial movement has supplied at least some of them with that. However, taking *The Politics of Friendship* into account, this possible shift in power has brought about a new dilemma. According to the *teleiopoetic* friendship model, giving one individual a voice should not result in the silencing of another.

At the heart of the *teleiopoetic*, unconditional democracy is not the traditional causality of democracy, where one individual's loss is another's gain, but a mutual gain that is inscribed in the act of reaching and being reached by the unknown or other. Catherine Belsey may not have been silenced, but she may have chosen silence to avoid conflict or disrupting the ongoing process of voicing the needs of the minority. In terms of the *teleiopoetic* friendship act, she denied both herself and the other the opportunity to be reached through the "patient power of imagination"[128] when she decided not to read Toni Morrison. The postcolonial discourse is venturing into an area of the modern democracy where they can become the majority at the expense of those who are not a part of the social or cultural groups of familiarity. One could argue that this is justified by the centuries of colonization, racism and general suppression the postcolonial subjects have gone through, or that a radical shift in power is necessary to establish even ground, but those arguments can only be made by partially ignoring the ethical and historical factors relevant to this matter.

Not reading literature from unfamiliar cultures will not make up for the suppression and injustices of the past, not reading cannot be accepted as an apology, as that apology, when acted out, becomes an empty promise of a new beginning. Not reading will not change the facts; it will not alter the realities of history. The choice to avoid the literature and voices of unfamiliarity has influenced the social and political history of the past, by allowing prejudices, which could have been challenged by literature, to live on. By continuing to avoid literature from minorities, we continue to ignore marginal voices that can challenge the western majority's understanding of the world. Reading postcolonial literature can contribute to a reevaluation, and ultimately, a rewriting of the narrative that has been constructed around the realities of history. That is why it is important that European and Anglo-American literary scholars do not exclude themselves from the postcolonial discourse out of fear of not being able to approach the difference in the right way.

[128] Spivak, "Harlem", 116.

Somewhere in the process of apologizing, the self-excluding transforms into a form of pride, where you exclude yourself to avoid having your mistakes corrected. In that sense, Gayatri Spivak might have been right in declaring that the survival of the discipline depends on how the realities of the new, globalized world is met. By closing the door to literature from unfamiliar cultures, or to scholars attempting to reach the sphere of the different, the tradition of exclusion and familiarity are allowed to continue. The postcolonial discourse must avoid becoming a discourse of familiarity, as that will only lead to further alienation and injustice.

Rather than "getting even", which in itself is impossible as the world is a much different place now than it was at the height of European colonialism, the focus of not only the postcolonial movement, but all of literary studies, should rather be attempting to find a position from which it is possible to think outside the boundaries of nations, regions, languages and cultures. "Getting even" has never been possible in any time or relationship, as that would imply that two individuals at one point in time could be exactly the same, and once again the development is driven in the direction of the destructive discourse of familiarity. National literature departments and Comparative Literature are no longer that different, as the idea of homogeneity has become a thing of the past also within national borders. National borders do not signify a geographical area with common denominators of a single people belonging to the same culture, it probably never did, but now it most certainly does not. The world has always been a place of heterogeneity, only now, faced with the realities of globalization, it is more important than ever that we do not continue believing in the social, cultural and political system of familiarity, as that will reinforce the imagined Aristotelian balance that is always threatening to destroy any possibility of experiencing what is different as different.

The process of globalization can provide the instability that is necessary to deliver us from the ghost of familiarity, but to realize that potential it is of importance that globalization is not used as a tool to create the impression of a reduced, world-wide cross-cultural difference. The borders have been blurred, and the Internet is providing information that is making the identification of difference more difficult, but it is still there and it still needs to be respected as different, and most of all it is of significance that no one chooses silence out of fear, pride or as an expression of guilt. Such a position will not accommodate progress, but strengthen the cultural protectionism that has emerged as one of the possible answers to globalization.

3.2 Literature as Democracy

A discussion of literature as democracy or a literary democratic potential is easily perceived as ideological or political literary criticism. This stems from the long tradition of dividing the study of literature into two opposing camps: the non-political readers of autonomous texts, and the ideological and political readers of socially relevant literature. Or as Rita Felski calls it: "theological and ideological styles of reading."[129] Both styles of reading have developed and changed since the New Criticism movement broke through with the idea of literature as autonomous in the US in the 1930's. The study of literature has developed with the changing times, but the theological style of reading's main idea, that literature is fundamentally different from the world we live in, and therefore cannot be read and judged on the basis of how we understand our human reality, is according to Felski, unchanged.[130] In the ideological camp, the situation is the same; the methods and theories have developed, but they still spring from the founding idea that literature should be placed "squarely in the social world"[131], and "always [be] part of something larger."[132]

Traditionally, postcolonial studies is located on the ideological side of the field, as postcolonial engagement with literature has been and are motivated by anti-colonialism and political struggles for race- and class equality. The question is whether this old idea, that the study of literature has to be either or, is the most fruitful approach to the literature itself. Rita Felski discusses that question in *Uses of Literature*, and argues not for a forcing together of the "ideologists" and "the aestheticists", but for a new *use* of literature that is less restricted by theoretical doctrines, and more open to the "common sense"[133] of "ordinary persons"[134]. Further on, Felski writes: "There is no compelling reason why the practice of theory requires us to go behind the backs of ordinary persons in order to expose their beliefs as deluded or delinquent."[135] She appears to be arguing for a more open and democratic literary field that is willing to include not only the complex theories, but also take into consideration the realities of the common persons, who is not familiar with the theoretical jargon, but nevertheless has a perception of the world and of literature that is rarely taken into account in either the theological or ideological styles of reading.

[129] Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature*, (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub., 2008), 4.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 6
[132] Ibid.
[133] Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 13.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

However, while the field of literary studies may exclude them, the common persons are more often than not well represented in the literature we read, and this is central to Felski, Mikhail Bakhtin, Martha C. Nussbaum, and in Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Literature*, which all will be discussed during the course of this chapter. It is also an interesting perspective to take into account when dealing with *Their Eyes*, as the common people are well represented in it, so much in fact that the novel was criticized for portraying the African Americans of the rural south as too simple and common.

3.2.1 Mikhail M. Bakhtin

Mikhail M. Bakhtin was one of the first modern academics to discuss the question of representation and democracy in literature. In the essay collection *The Dialogic Imagination* he argues against the formalist understanding of literature, using the novel as his prime example. Though Bakhtin's essays usually are not read as arguments for the democratic potential of literature, many of his ideas, like polyphony and heteroglossia, are closely linked to what we today associate with democracy; plurality, freedom of speech, diversity, etc. He limits these qualities to the novel, arguing that all other literary genres are more or less "antiquated"[136], because they have been stylistically completed "outside historically documented observation"[137] and are therefore not flexible and historically acute like the novel.[138]

This rendering of traditional genres like poetry, drama and epic is reductive and severely lacking in nuancing, and as we shall see in Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Literature,* it is possible to see also the "antiquated" genres as democratic expressions in relation to aesthetics. However, Bakhtin's work with the novel is highly interesting when discussing the possibility of thinking literature as a form of democracy. Bakhtin points out three features that distinguish the novel from the other genres:

> (1) its stylistic three-dimensionality, which is linked with the multi-languaged consciousness realized in the novel; (2) the radical change it effects in the temporal coordinates of the literary image; (3) the new zone opened by the novel for structuring literary images, namely, the zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its openendedness.[139]

[136] Michail Bachtin, (Ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, vol. no. 1, Voprosy Literatury I Ėstetiki (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 3.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 11.

In Bakhtin's understanding of the genre hierarchy, the novel is the only genre that has the potential to convey a realistic image of the present that is flexible and open-ended, and that potential is created between these three features.

The novel's stylistic three-dimensionality consists of the traditional space and time layers that can also be found in the older genres, but in addition to these two, the novel has a third dimension. This dimension is, according to Bakhtin, what makes the novel able to convey a variety of different consciousnesses, through what he calls "heteroglossia"[140]. This new literary feature is a direct result of what Bakhtin describes as "[A] new cultural and creative consciousness… in an actively polyglot world… The period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other, comes to an end."[141] This transmission of media and opinions across borders, cultures and languages is an effect of what we today call globalization, and is, according to Bakhtin, the development that has introduced a new stylistic dimension to the novel.

The archaic genres' third stylistic dimension is also language, but the novels' language dimension is polyglot, giving it the ability to convey a multitude of voices, voicing different consciousnesses in different languages. This does not only mean that the characters in a novel can speak different national languages, but also that differences in background, class, race, etc. can be expressed effectively through the layered language of the novel, which also provides room for the authorial voice, the character voices and the voices of the narrators. *Their Eyes* is a prime example of Bakhtin's polyglot novel, as it uses many different voices, speaking in different languages, to convey the story of Janie Crawford's life with stylistic and narrative fullness, making it realistic in the sense that the main characters are portrayed as dynamic rather than flat characters. Bakhtin does not draw any parallels between his understanding of the novel as a three-dimensional, polyglot medium and the democratic principle of representation and free speech, but there are correlations that will be exemplified later in this segment and in the reading of *Their Eyes* in chapter four.

The second and third distinguishing features of the novel are related through their common concern with "the thematic aspect of structure in the novel as a genre."[142] Bakhtin compares the novel to the epic, pointing out the radical change that happens in the novel genre's temporal coordinates. In the epic, the past is the valorized source of knowledge, if anything does happen in the present, it is always inspired by, or a direct consequence of the

[140] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 12. Heteroglossia are sometimes also translated as "polyglossia".
[141] Ibid.
[142] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 13.

past. In the novel, Bakhtin claims, things happen in the present, and point towards the future. The epic is based on memory alone; the novel is based on knowledge.[143] This means that the novel is given the opportunity to remember the past and transfer that memory onto the present, creating an image of the present that accounts for both the past and the possible future. As shall be shown in chapter four, Hurston uses this technique in the narrative frame of *Their Eyes* to provide Janie with distance, and the ability to reflect on the memories of her past, in the novel's present. Though the future is not directly referred to, it becomes part of the novel's temporal sphere, as Janie's newfound self-awareness and inner development points to a hopeful future where she can be happy and content without that strong presence of another individual that she has relied on in the past, because she has become independent and emotionally self-sufficient.

This tying together of the past, present and future in the novel creates the third distinguishing feature, namely "the zone of maximal contact with the present."[144] That present is not just the given present of the novel, but a continuing present, meaning that the novel can reflect a present in a time that is not the particular novels original present. This is made possible by the defining features of the novel genre, such as its temporal shift from the classical era's past tense perspective, to the novel's present tense perspective; the "eternally living element of unofficial language and unofficial thought…"[145], meaning the lowly language and thought of the common people that replaces the classical era's high language as the dominant stylistic and thematic focal point in the novel;[146] the novel's use of dynamic characters that can develop and change, not just within the novel, but also with the changing readerly perspective; the characters are no longer the standardized heroes of the classical past, but common persons with strengths and faults who can be recognized not only as mythical and abstract creations of a valorized past, but as something close to human.

Due to its inherent open-endedness in language and style, the novel is not tied to one particular time that eventually always will become an epic "absolute past".[147] The novel's temporal coordinates ensure that the genre is structured around a literary image and form that is accessible beyond the singular novel's current.[148] Janie's path to selfhood and independence in *Their Eyes* is situated within the context of a black community that has recently gained freedom as a result of the abolition of slavery. However, the story can easily

[143] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 15.
[144] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 11.
[145] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 20.
[146] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* 13-20.
[147] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 13.
[148] Ibid.

be transferred into the current present, because it centers on human "experience, knowledge and practice"[149] which makes it recognizable even without the original context at close historical distance. This is made possible by the novel's narrative style. The dynamic characters and choice of narrative perspective ensures that there is room for differing opinions and experience-based interpretations of situations that occur in the novel, not only amongst the characters and the narrators in the novel, but also in the reader and the interpretive communities.

The novel's original present has become our past, but *Their Eyes* can be read and reinterpreted in ways that can be actualized and reactualized in a given present, because it is structured as an open-ended narrative about human experience and development, with characters and narrators that speak and think with human resemblance, and who act within a sphere of experience and knowledge that is closely tied to the real world and to real human experiences. Combined, Bakhtin sees these three features as distinguishing for the novel as a genre. It differs from Martha C. Nussbaum's interpretation of the novel as a democratic art form. Nussbaum deals with the novel genre's democratic potential in terms of the reader and how the novel's thematic world can create a situation of imaginative compassion in the reader, while Bakhtin is interested in how the stylistic and formal elements of the novel forms an entirely new genre with distinguishing features, which makes it necessary to change the way we approach literature. Nussbaum's theory of the novel will be further explored in the following segment. However, the changes that Bakhtin argues happens in the novel can also be interpreted as distinguishing features of democracy, and as an argument for the democratic potential inherent in the novel genre. I will explore that idea in what is to follow.

3.2.2 Martha C. Nussbaum

The philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum is, like Bakhtin, mainly interested in the novel genre, more specifically the realist novel from the late 19th and early 20th century. Many of her observations regarding the novel's qualities and features are similar to those made by Bakhtin. However, while Bakhtin's perspective is the structure and formal elements of the novel, and how those features distinguishes the novel from other literary genre's and represents a new form of literature, Nussbaum is more interested in how the novelistic story can affect the reader. The political and compassionate potential she identifies in the novel are related to the formal elements Bakhtin examines, but she does not dwell on *how* the effects

[149] Ibid.

she claims the novel can have on the reader is created, but on the effects in themselves. In the first chapter, "The Literary Imagination"[150], Nussbaum writes:

> The novel is a *living form* and in fact still the central morally serious yet popularly engaging fictional form of our culture… But if we are going to speak about *contemporary public life*, and the ways in which *concrete circumstances shape human emotions and aspirations*, it seems wise to focus on a genre that is *still productive*, and in which concrete circumstances that are relevant to our deliberations may be depicted. (Emphasis added)[151]

The similarities between Nussbaum and Bakhtin's understanding of the novel genre and its ability to be relevant in a continuing present are made clear in the excerpt quoted above. Nussbaum is also interested in the use of layered language in the novel, which Bakhtin calls heteroglossia: "So we have *at least three social worlds in play*: that of the action of the novel, that of the authorial voice, and that of the reader (itself, in turn, a multiplicity, *since the novel does not restrict its address to readers of a single place and time.)*" (Emphasis added)[152] Nussbaum is using a line of argumentation that seems is close to Bakhtin's theory of the novel, and she does it to explain why she has chosen to eliminate most other literary genres than the novel from her analysis in *Poetic Justice*, which is also in keeping with the genre theory Bakthin presents in "The Epic and the Novel: Towards a Study of the Methodology of the Novel".

Bakhtin and Nussbaum share the idea of what a novel is and what it can be in a larger social and political context, only Bakhtin does not make the connection with democracy. Nussbaum thus provides a current point of access to Bakhtin's theory of the novel, and makes it possible to relate his theory to democracy, through Nussbaum, which is mainly interested in how the novel can affect its readers and ultimately, the democratic society. However, Nussbaum and Bakhtin's schematic idea of a genre hierarchy, where the novel, for different reasons, are the literary genre best suited to describe and reflect (Bakhtin), and to reflect and affect (Nussbaum) the realities of life in the modern society, represents a limitation when dealing with the question of literature as democracy. Nussbaum does nuance it somehow by using Walt Whitman's poetry as one of her examples, but justifies the use of Whitman by claiming that his lyrical poetry shows a "commitment both to narrative and to the concrete depiction of different ways of life […] [that] brings him into close contact with the novel."[153]

---

[150] Note the similarity to the title of Bakhtin's collection of essays *The Dialogic Imagination*.
[151] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston, MA: Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995), 7.
[152] Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 7.
[153] Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 7.

Both Bakhtin and Nussbaum suggests that the novelistic features of a literary work is what establishes the connection between literature and the world, and thus makes possible a democratization of literature. Consequently, other literary genres, which does not incorporate the distinguishing features of the novel, cannot make this connection, and therefore, according to Nussbaum, cannot affect the reader in the same way a realist novel can. This is a limiting way of understanding how the aesthetics of literature works, internally in the work (Bakhtin) and externally towards the reader (Nussbaum). Nussbaum's argument is closely tied to the imaginative process activated in the reader, while reading. I argue that this imaginative process, previously referred to as *teleiopoesis* in Derrida, is activated no matter the literary genre, and that the aesthetical aspect present in all fictional literature is what activates this imaginative process. This particular notion is further explored throughout the thesis.

The connection between the novel and democracy is not made directly by Bakhtin, but there is a tension in his essays that reflects some form of political awareness as he takes a stand for the literary genre he believes is most capable of teaching us something about the world and society we live in. That particular connection is Nussbaum's philosophical focal point, her goal is to make a convincing argument that literature (the novel) can provide students and practitioners of the law with an insight into the realities of humanity and society that can be useful in their chosen profession. The main question in this segment is not "The novel as democracy?" but "Literature as democracy?" Therefore the position shared by Nussbaum and Bakhtin, that out of all the literary genres, the novel is the most "alive" and therefore best suited for a realistic depiction of life and social and political development, has to be challenged. The interest of this thesis is not how the realistic novel can depict democratic life, but how literature as art can be a political force without losing sight of the aesthetic premise of art.

Possibly as interesting as the challenging of the idea of the novel as the "best" genre, is the question of why that idea should be challenged. The novel has certain qualities, like length and narrative layering, which admittedly does give it some advantages in portraying social realities. However, the objection to the genre hierarchy has nothing to do with the inherent political potential in particular literary genres. The claim is not that the novel is not better suited for a realistic portrayal of social and political structures and the individuals within them, because for that sort of realism, the novel is the best. The genre's possibility to convey both the small and the big social pictures at the same time, in a fashion that appeals to a large group of readers, is probably unparalleled in the world of literary genres. However,

the genre hierarchy that Bakhtin and Nussbaum apply is problematic because of its rigid focus on the literary elements that is directly connected to the world, and to politics.

Nussbaum makes no room for the aesthetical aspects of literature that is not directly relatable to the real, political world. She consequently excludes entire genres because she sees the novel as the only genre that is 'productive'; able to depict concrete circumstances that are relevant to the reader's real ethical and political deliberations, and qualified to "form bonds of identification and sympathy" with the reader.[154] She appears to be making the mistake of only attaching political value to literature which is 'social' and 'outgoing', working under the pretense that the novel is able to create a nearly universally valid representation of a real world that invites readers into a literary sphere of ethical evaluation and deliberation, and that the genre's quality is its ability to make itself politically relevant more than anything else.

However, Nussbaum's theory of how the realist novel can broaden the way in which we understand our own world and the decisions we make within it is interesting and probably accurate, but she builds her argumentation on an understanding of the literary genre hierarchy that is too simplistic and ideological. The realist novel is not the only genre capable of activating imagination and producing the broadened understanding of our society and world. The novels she chooses to work with (Dickens' *Hard Times*, Wright's *Native Son* and Forster's *Maurice*) are all published in the 19th or early 20th century, and they are all deeply rooted in the realist literary tradition. The genre has developed and become much more diverse since these three novels were published, and while the realist novel is still a popular subgenre, there are many examples of novels that do not deal with the real world and society in the same direct manner as Nussbaum's three example novels. Nussbaum has not just narrowed it down to one literary genre; she is also demanding a certain type of high realism that makes her definition of a politically acute novel – a novel that can provoke the reader's "compassionate imagination"[155] – even narrower.

The idea of compassionate imagination is in itself an interesting approach to the reader's response to literature. The idea is similar to *teleiopoesis*, as they both are models of perception and reception that focuses on the human ability to experience another reality without actually being in it, or even necessarily having the knowledge to understand what they are experiencing. When reading, the reader can become part of a fictional democracy of characters with different social, economic and racial backgrounds, striving to represent and

[154] Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 6-7.
[155] Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, XVIII.

fulfill their own needs and dreams, and both observe and contribute to how power and voice is distributed and valorized within the literary work, by choosing to listen or overhear as the characters speak their minds and express their needs. As readers, we cannot change the outcome of the internal story, but our reading will always be situated within a sphere of expectations that is based on our own understanding of, and experience from, the real world. That is why a reader, especially of postcolonial literature situated far from the reader's own sphere of experience and expectation, must be aware of their situation as situated, and employ compassionate imagination and ethical methods while reading. After all, we the readers are the representatives of the literature we read and the characters we meet while reading, and that is a role that should be taken seriously.

By understanding the reader as a representative, the one having to stretch her imagination to the limit to experience what is distant, unfamiliar or unknown, and thereby find a way to valorize literature and the characters within it, distributing power, it becomes important that we relate to the matter in a manner as ethically aware as possible. That is where Nussbaum finds a parallel between the novel and the legal system, and that is why it is possible to view literature as democracy in Nussbaum's understanding. As citizens of a democratic society, we are all, to varying degrees, represented. None of our representatives are equipped to understand each and every citizen's reality, because their reality might be very far from the reality of the citizen. That means that the representatives have to stretch their imagination to be able to see how their decisions can influence the lives of the citizens whose reality is far from their own.

In a well-functioning democratic society, the elected representatives have good imaginations, they are able to experience through imagination the consequences their actions may have on different social groups and individual by the power of their imagination, and if the imagination is compassionate as well as powerful, their decisions are likely to be better than the decisions made by an uncompassionate and unimaginative government, because imagination provides the ability view each case from a multitude of perspectives. When reading, the reader takes on the role of the representative, and it becomes her task to employ her imagination as powerfully and compassionately as possible, to ensure that as many of the voices in the novel, or poem, drama or epic, is heard and judged justly, and finally, that the literature itself is given a fair trial, meaning that the reader is aware of her role as distributer of power in terms of both the internal and external literary hierarchy of power and voice, and her situatedness in the reading process.

When talking about voice in literature, it is problematic to limit the understanding of voice to only encompass the social and political voices; the 'outgoing' speech that is directly present in a literary work. That is what Nussbaum does when she excludes most literature, with the exception of realist novels, from her philosophical inquiry. If the reading becomes strictly ideological it will, like a strictly ideological government, drown out the subtle voices and the voices of minority and marginality, because the ultimate goal is to win the large ideological battle. One of the voices that may get lost in the ideological reading process is the aesthetic voice. As is discussed in the following segment, the academic discourse on postcolonial literature has had a tendency to diminish the aesthetic qualities of postcolonial literary works, because interest in the aesthetics of the postcolonial has often been regarded a sidetrack in the framework of anti-colonial political struggle. This is not to say that one cannot read with political orientation, it is to say that the reader has to be aware that only certain voices in the chosen literary work is heard if the style of reading is purely ideological. It is therefore necessary to employ the Aristotelian golden mean as a principle to find a healthy middle between the ideological and the theological, because they, when applied rigidly, both exclude points and voices of interest from the reading process.

The ideological reading orientation risk excluding the subtle and aesthetical perspectives, and the theological reading orientation risk excluding the political perspective. One cannot hear every voice in a work of literature, that is impossible, as each reader necessarily will have a different point of entry and a different perspective to bring to the reading process, and therefore will recognize and emphasize dissimilar parts and voices in a literary work. However, a reader can enter the reading process with self-awareness, and to some degree try to use that self-awareness so that the reading experience does not become an act of selfishness, as that will result in a reading that does not give room to the voices that are not as easily recognizable. Nussbaum's goal is altruistic; she wants to use literature in a way that can ultimately have positive consequences on the macro level of democratic society, but the starting point and premise of her philosophical thought experiment is too narrow, and makes the realization of Nussbaum's goal very difficult in the broader context of difference. To achieve anything like what Nussbaum is suggesting, I believe it is necessary to incorporate the aesthetics of literature as an active part of the reader's experience.

3.2.3 Jacques Rancière

Jacques Rancière examines the same possibility as Martha C. Nussbaum, of viewing literature as a radical democratic art form that potentially can influence how we understand our society and political world, and affect our actions within it. However, Rancière's approaches the idea in a broader and less ideological sense than Martha Nussbaum:

> The expression "politics of literature" implies that literature does politics simply by being literature. It assumes that we don't need to worry about whether writers should go in for politics or stick to the purity of their art instead, but that this very purity has something to do with politics.[156]

Rancière's argument is that all literature, no matter how closed off from the world and a-political it pretends to be or appears, is a public expression, and public expressions are always political. Saying that you do not care or do not want to get involved with politics out loud is a political statement in itself. Consequently, it is impossible for literature to be anything but political, because literature is always an expression of a need to be heard and have your voice recognized as speech, and that is, according to Rancière, what defines politics. It is not really about economy or distribution of power; it is about demonstrating your ability to participate in the common public by speaking, and thereby becoming visible as a human being. Politics is, in Rancière's understanding, the "distribution of the perceptible".[157]

However, literature is not only democratic insofar as it is a written public expression of a human voice; it is also an inviting public expression. A democratic platform that anyone can access, take part in and have opinions on:

> That is what the democracy of writing consists in: its garrulous mutism cancels the distinction between men of speech-in-action and men of noisy suffering voice, between those who act and those who merely live. The democracy of literature is the regime of the world-at-large that anyone can grab hold of, either to appropriate the life led by the heroes or heroines of novels for themselves, or to turn themselves into writers, or to insert themselves into the discussion of common affairs.[158]

In Rancière's understanding, literature went through a revolution in the nineteenth century when writers started to write about the "ordinary human beings, beings dedicated to the repetition and reproduction of unadorned life."[159]

---

[156] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, Politique De La Littérature (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 3.
[157] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 4.
[158] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 13.
[159] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 11.

This shift, from being an art form dedicated to representation of ancient ideals, directed at an audience consisting of "princes, generals, magistrates and preachers"[160], literature became an expression and a depiction of life among those who up until then had been a part of a social class that was not given the tools or opportunity to read, or appear in, literature. Literature became a democratic arena for political activity, and political activity "introduces new objects and subjects onto the common stage. It makes visible what was invisible, it makes audible as speaking beings those who were previously heard only as noisy animals."[161] Consequently, all literature, not only the novel, is a democratic arena where political activity in the form of distribution of perception happens.

Rancière's definition of literature as democracy does not only cover the external democratic potential of literature, but also the internal. Modern literature does not only invite readers to become speakers through the conversationalist nature of literature, and thereby practitioners of democracy, but does also give space and voice to those whose speech is not necessarily heard or recognized in a real democratic situation, internally in a literary work. This idea of literature making "visible what was invisible"[162] projects the same potential on to literature in general, which Bakhtin identifies in the novel, and Nussbaum in the realistic novel, in particular. Literature is democratic because it potential can allow for all voices to become public speech, also the marginal minority voices.

Rancière's broadening of the terms of what a democracy is, creates a situation where all literature is, in the deepest sense, political, because it is an arena where everybody potentially can participate, and everybody potentially can be heard. The reader participation is limited to those who can read, but through the internal democracy of literature, also the illiterate can be heard. In that way, Rancière's literary democratic model remains inclusive in a way that Bakhtin and Nussbaum's do not. The possibility of representation in literature is not determined on the level of ability to read or the possibility of being conveyed in a realistic and politically interesting manner, it is rather a question of being human and having a voice, which might have been misunderstood as the growl of a "noisy animal"[163], but in literature can be translated into human speech and claim its place in the common public.

In Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes*, the voices of a people and a culture unfamiliar to the majority are allowed to speak. Voices which, up until then, had been suppressed from the democratic arena and diminished, either as mythical inventions by people with cruel

[160] Ibid.
[161] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 4.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.

intentions, or a as a ghost from a long-surpassed past. As seen in the reviews of the novel cited previously in the thesis, written by Richard Wright and Alan Locke, some of the most prominent African American people in the American society at the time, Hurston's conveying of the voices of the African American's of the rural South was met with disapproval in the black academic and artistic community. Alan Locke accused Hurston of portraying her characters like "pseudo-primitives".[164] However, according to the theory of Rancière, by portraying the characters Hurston is portraying, she is actually shifting the distribution of the perceptible, allowing for people whose voices are not heard in the world, to speak in *Their Eyes*. Hurston is performing a *dissensus*:

> Dissensus are forms of creation that are irreducible to the spatio-temporal horizons of a given factual community. In other word, the disruption that they effect is not simply a reordering of the relations of power between existing groups; dissensus is not an institutional overturning. It is an activity that cuts across forms of cultural and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception.[165]

So while the use of eye dialect might seem like a way of conveying primitivism, like Wright and Locke interpreted it, what Hurston is actually doing is giving the black people of the rural South a voice and a possibility to speak in the way most natural to them, and thereby become a part of the public sphere and the democratic arena. She is actively working to introduce the people, the tradition and the history of the African American communities of the rural South "into the field of perception."[166]

This happens as a result of the aestheticism of *Their Eyes*, as the history of reception shows that Hurston's way of describing is more important than what she is describing. It is her style and manner of presenting the stories and conversations of her characters which mainly caused Locke and Wright to deem the novel a failure, and it is the aestheticism of her novel that I argue makes it possible for the reader to experience something beyond the horizon of the familiar while reading it. Rancière argues that dissensus is what connects politics and aesthetics, that the struggle to introduce voices as human into society and democracy is the common denominator in both the world of politics and the world of aesthetics. Rancière thus makes it possible to argue that the aesthetics of *Their Eyes* is

---

[164] Alan Locke, *Opportunity*, January 1938: (http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam358/wrightrev.html), [17.04.15].
[165] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 2.
[166] Ibid.

inherently political, and that Hurston's novel is part of a process to shift the democratic focus onto new subjects *as subjects*.

Rancière's broadening of the definition of democracy, and understanding of how literature can reflect and be a democratic arena, is important because it eliminates the problem of the dogmatic ideological reading. By recognizing all literature as political, the ideological battle becomes less important, because the political premise is laid out before the reading can even begin; literature is connected to the world and to politics by way of its inherent structure of dissensus. By removing the question of whether literature is political or not from the equation, Rancière creates a reading situation where the reader is free to experience the literature *as such*, already knowing that it belongs to this world. The Aristotelian golden mean is achieved, because the reader is in a position where she can experience the aesthetical aspects of literature as well as the social and political ones, knowing that they can coexist and even emphasize each other.

Steven Corcoran writes, in the introduction to *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*: "For Rancière, genuine political or artistic activities always involve forms of innovation that tear bodies from their assigned places and free speech and expression from all reduction to functionality."[167] To free the aesthetic from functionality would mean to liberate it from the critical demand for political acuteness, and rather recognize that the literature is in itself a sign of political participation. For academic discourses such as the postcolonial in the literary field, this would mean that the attention paid to the political aspects of a literary work of art, rather than the artistic, is a reductive reading strategy, because the political potential, or dissensus, of any literary work of art is located in, and springs from, the aesthetics of that work.

The democracy of literature and the democracy of society are thus linked in the dissensus that creates it and it creates; the dissensus that both maintains it and threatens to destroy it. Rancière calls it "the paradox of democracy":[168]

> Democracy […] here designates 'democratic government', that good form of government able to master the excess threatening good policy in general. But this threatening excess is also given the name of democracy […] democratic government is threatened by nothing other than democratic life […] democracy as a form of government is threatened by democracy as a form of social and political life and so the former must repress the latter.[169]

[167] Rancière, *Dissensus,* 1.
[168] Rancière, *Dissensus,* 47.
[169] Ibid.

Their Eyes represented such an excess to the establishment when it was first published, because it forges a relation between the readers of the novel and the subjects it presents to democracy. It challenges the established ideas of what is the 'right' way of confronting and conveying the history and lives of African American people, and threaten to destroy the established understanding of how a modern African American lives, thinks, behaves and what they experience, as human beings in a democratic society. By reclaiming and reintroducing the use of eye dialect, removing it from the sphere of racism and suppression, and reinventing it as the folkloric art of the rural South, Hurston provided aesthetic excess to the social and political life in the USA. *Their Eyes* is aesthetic dissensus and democracy at work.

3.3 Postcolonial Aesthetics: Egalitarianism and Difference

In the article "A Postcolonial Aesthetic: Repeating Upon the Present",[170] Elleke Boehmer presents the possibility of a postcolonial aesthetic. She proposes an approach to the postcolonial that is based on formal aesthetics, inspired by philosophers such as Hegel, Kant and Adorno. She argues that the critical readings which privilege the "'engaged', politicized or ethical nature of postcolonial literary production"[171] greatly outnumber the aesthetical readings, because aesthetics has been viewed as "a western, middle-class indulgence."[172] Boehmer's article has become central in the discourse on postcolonial aesthetics that has developed over the last years, with contributing scholars such as Chandi Lokuge, Graham Huggan, Deepika Bahri and John Su.

Boehmer's proposal of a postcolonial aesthetic is relevant to this thesis because it deals with questions related to the postcolonial discourse's dealings with the aesthetic and the political in literature. This topic is sensitive, because as Boehmer points out, aesthetics has a tendency to be interpreted as a 'middle-class indulgence' within postcolonial discourse, probably because the usefulness of aesthetics in the anti-colonial political struggle is not necessarily obvious. Boehmer lifts the topic of postcolonial aesthetics in her article, and creates an access point from which the relationship between aesthetics and politics in regards to the postcolonial can be discussed. That discussion is central in the remaining part of the

[170] Janet Wilson, Cristina Şandru, and Sarah Lawson Welsh, *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium* (London: Routledge, 2010).
[171] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 170.
[172] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 170.

thesis. However, Boehmer's universal approach, her wish to establish a postcolonial aesthetic, can become problematic in terms of Rancière's idea of aesthetics as inherently political.

Boehmer's argument for developing a postcolonial aesthetic framework is, in her own words, strategic: "Thinking strategically, if we were able to formulate, even just in a preliminary way, the notion of a postcolonial aesthetic, if we were able to establish postcolonial aesthetic protocols, this would assist in legitimating the study of postcolonial writing *qua* writing, as not simply reducible to testimony, tract or manifesto."[173] Here, Boehmer both agrees and disagrees with Rancière. They agree on the question of how political readings can be reductive, but where Boehmer appears to suggest that in order to avoid such a reduction it is necessary to distance the reading completely from politics, Rancière argues that it is impossible to keep politics at a distance when reading, because literature is inherently political. For Rancière, denying or suppressing the politicality of literature to enhance the aesthetic is useless, because the two aspects are interchangeable. However, it is the fact that literature *is* politics that makes it possible to focus on literature as art, and it is the aesthetics of literature that makes it political.

Boehmer's approach is based on a philosophical tradition with an interest in locating the universal, and in keeping with that tradition she makes a preliminary identification of "hybridity and inbetweeness, possibly also sly civility, postmodern slippage and breakage"[174] as the aesthetically defining features of postcolonial literature. However, she admits that relying on those features alone to identify a postcolonial aesthetic would exclude a great deal of postcolonial literature.[175] Boehmer is trying to formulate a postcolonial aesthetic that is both including and specific enough to work as a universal aesthetic program for the postcolonial. She turns to her literary examples to show the productiveness of thinking "not only of their [the postcolonial texts] many differences, but also, at the same time, of the possible ways in which these three texts might be seen as participating heterogeneously and yet collectively in some postcolonial aesthetic."[176]

Identifying universal aesthetic categories in postcolonial literature as Boehmer attempts to do, is difficult and problematic. The idea of a shared aesthetic in a literary tradition as diverse as the postcolonial, or any other literary discourse for that matter, can result in a homogenization that is not in accordance with reality. Boehmer problematizes a

[173] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 171.
[174] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 175.
[175] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 175.
[176] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 176.

homogenizing perspective several times in her article. Professor Robert Young was asked to comment on Boehmer's idea of a postcolonial aesthetic as presented in "A Postcolonial Aesthetic" in an interview he gave during a conference on postcolonial literature at Monash University:

> The postcolonial is all about diversity, after all, so that must apply to its aesthetics as to everything else. There are many different ways in which writing can involve forms of critique and resistance. Having said that, I do agree that one of the problems with the discussions and accounts of postcolonial literature is that the aesthetic qualities of postcolonial literature tend to be sidelined, even though the reason why we choose to read some books rather than others is not just their thematic, but also their aesthetic quality […] I am just not so sure there is "a" postcolonial aesthetic.[177]

Postcolonial diversity is, according to Young, impossible to categorize and analyze from already given distinguishing aesthetic features, because the postcolonial resists clear definition and categorization.[178] As such, Boehmer's categories of "inbetweeness and hybridity"[179] are in fact a definition of the postcolonial as something that cannot really be defined, because it takes place outside stability. The level of vagueness in Boehmer's proposed postcolonial aesthetic might support Young's position that there is no reason or need to make a postcolonial aesthetic, because the postcolonial will continue to elude definition.

What Robert Young and Elleke Boehmer do, to a certain extent, agree on is the significance of language and voice in the postcolonial. Boehmer argues that language can be interpreted as the essence of the postcolonial aesthetic: "One could argue it is the *language* of postcolonial writing that embodies more or less what we mean when we refer to a postcolonial aesthetic."[180] Young describes language as "a site of anxiety"[181] in the postcolonial, because writers of postcolonial literature often have several languages that they can chose to write in, but none that feels "their own".[182] However, Young does not agree with Boehmer's argument that language is the essence of the postcolonial aesthetic, and points to the many authors that are identified as writers of postcolonial literature, but "who in some sense have a straightforward relation to one particular language, which isn't mediated by any

[177] C. Noske and R. Young, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic? An Interview with Robert Young," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing.* 50, no. 5 (2014), 613.
[178] Noske and Young, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic?", 612-13.
[179] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 170.
[180] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 175.
[181] Noske and Young, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic?", 614-15.
[182] Ibid.

other."[183] He argues that language should rather be understood as the essence of a postcolonial experience that is significant to each writer of a language that is not her own, and which will influence the literary voice, but that it is not an element that can be found in all postcolonial literature.[184]

The problem with Boehmer's initial suggestion of a postcolonial aesthetic is that it presumes that similarities can be found in all postcolonial literature, when the postcolonial discourse in fact is moving in the direction of becoming more diverse than ever. The postcolonial is not only an anti-colonial movement with strong ties to politics, it has become a wide definition that includes almost any form of literary production that is not part of the Western cultural hegemony, or is only partially part of it.[185] This is a development Boehmer supports in her argument for a more aesthetically interested critical discourse, because taking interest in the aesthetics of postcolonial literature can potentially open up the definition even more, as a focus on language and descriptions of in-betweenness or hybridity can situate more literature within the postcolonial discourse.

However, her idea of a universal aesthetic can also potentially contribute to a narrowing down of the field. What happens when new postcolonial literature that challenges Boehmer's aesthetical definition appears, and what about already-published postcolonial literature that is not in keeping with Boehmer's aesthetical scheme? Will literature that does not fit be excluded from the postcolonial aesthetic definition, or will the terms of definition have to be negotiated each time a new aesthetical interpretation of the postcolonial experience appears in literature?

Boehmer first categorizes postcolonial aesthetic as separated from postcolonial politics. She draws a line between the two aspects of critical reading, and suggests that a postcolonial aesthetic must distance itself from the politics of the postcolonial to achieve a "purely aesthetic approach or theory".[186] However, Boehmer then makes room for a bridging of the postcolonial and the aesthetical: "Above all, it implies a concern not to read that work *only* with orientation to other frames of reference, historical, social, or political, but on its own terms […]"(Emphasis added).[187] Here, the word "only" opens up for the possibility of reading with an orientation to the political, as long as that is not the "only" orientation, implying that you can read with a political orientation *and* an aesthetic. However, she then goes back to her

[183] Noske and Young, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic?", 614.
[184] Ibid.
[185] For example, the Danish poet Yahya Hassan can be understood as a postcolonial poet, because his literary production describes the cultural hybridity of a first-generation immigrant to a Western country.
[186] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 170.
[187] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 171.

initial position, stating "*political* writing […] quite *contra* the transcendence associated with certain versions of the aesthetic […] never loses sight of ideology" (emphasize added).[188] By using the term "political writing" in this way, Boehmer appears to suggest that some postcolonial writing is strictly political, and cannot be read as a work of art or for its aesthetic.

However, by the end of the article, Boehmer's suggestion that there is a universal postcolonial aesthetic, and that it would be useful to identify it, has regenerated and become a theory that a postcolonial aesthetic might not be a formal or structural aesthetic, but that "there is that within an aesthetic that we might call postcolonial that draws in the postcolonial world, imbibes its affect, and constellates and reconstellates its meanings through *our reading of it, our participation in it*" (emphasis added).[189] This last suggestion is philosophically close to Bakhtin, Nussbaum and Rancière's respective theories of literature's connection to the world, because Boehmer finds a place for reader-participation in her model. She still employs 'aesthetic' in the singular form and refers to *a* 'postcolonial world', but by taking the reader into account, Boehmer is accepting that the postcolonial aesthetic might be postcolonial *aesthetics*, because the reader 'constellates and reconstellates its [postcolonial literature's] *meanings*[…]' (emphasize added).

After having explored the possibilities of both purely aesthetical reading and readings that allow for both the political and the aesthetical, Boehmer concludes with the already cited perspective on reader-participation. As readers we are given the option to focus purely on either aesthetics or politics, or we can try to merge the two orientations. Boehmer appears to be arguing for last option in her closing section of "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", and is thereby closing in on a perspective on the relationship between aesthetics and politics that is similar to Rancière's.[190]

3.3.1 The Problem with Universalism

Homi K. Bhaba has worked with the idea of the universal in relation to the postcolonial, in a lecture transcribed in the article "Vernacular Cosmopolitism" (Orig. "Dialektal kosmopolitism", my translation) he is quoted:

> While the focus now is mainly on diasporic communities and global migration, it is easy to forget the regional differences and the cultural distance within the nations and national

[188] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 172.
[189] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 180.
[190] Boehmer, "A Postcolonial Aesthetic", 180.

> societies, the everyday contrasts and dislocations that affect the aboriginal lives of the minorities. (my translation) [191]

Bhabha is, like Robert Young, interested in the diversity of the postcolonial. When working within a discourse, like the postcolonial, it is important to be aware and sensitive to the internal dissimilarities. Otherwise, "the postcolonial" can easily become the name of an imagined homogeneous group of 'different' people, different only meaning different from the majority, while there in reality is vast geographical, racial, cultural and religious differences also within the postcolonial discourse. These differences cannot be accounted for in a universal sweep of the aesthetic of the postcolonial, or in a purely politically oriented examination of the postcolonial struggle for justice and equality. The diversity of the postcolonial, as that of all other literary discourses, cannot be fully grasped or comprehended, and the diversity, singularity and difference, even within a single literary work, must be respected.

To make a comparison, the idea of universal postcolonial aesthetic can be compared to the democratic government, wishing to categorize and control the democratic activities acted out by the democratic counterpart to the government in Rancière's "democratic paradox".[192] Boehmer's suggestion of a postcolonial aesthetic is closely linked to the traditionalist notion of "center and periphery",[193] which is one of the things connected to universalism that Bhabha calls out in his article on the topic, and which also can be related to the idea of democracy. In the context of democracy 'center' would be the majority; 'periphery' would be the minority. Bhabha is not interest in the generalized idea of a majority or a minority, but in that which can be found "behind the great narratives about center and periphery."[194] Behind the great narratives, or beyond the horizon, without horizon, as Derrida envisions the process of *teleiopoesis*.[195]

In this context of reaching behind or beyond, Bhabha is interested in intimacy as opposed to universalism and democracy:

---

[191]Homi Bhabha, "Dialektal Kosmopolitism," *Glänta*, no. 3 (2001). Original:"Medan man nuförtiden ägnar stor üppmerksamhet åt diasporiska gemenskaper och globala migrationer, glömmer man ofta bort de regionala skillnaderna och kulturella avstånden inom de nationella gemenskaperna, de vardagliga motsättningar och förskjutningar som upptar minoriteternas inhemska liv."
[192] Rancière, *Dissensus*, 47.
[193] Bhabha, "Dialektal Kosmopolitism," 17. Original: "centrum och periferi"
[194] Ibid. Original: "bakom de stora berättelserna om centrum och periferi"
[195] Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 12.

> It is the closeness and intimacy of the cultural differences, not the great distance between people and nations, that is the most critical and crisis-ridden area of communication. Aziz and Adela tried to create a new medium for understanding, one that would make it irrelevant for them both to retreat to the certainties of their own cultural coherence […] They are literally 'forced together', and it is from this perspective that Forster, himself a proclaimed liberal, questions the efficiency of what I call 'long-distance liberalism': this means that when the world of universalism, tolerance and justice are portrayed in an abstract manner as philosophical ideals or historical ideas, they do not spring from the heterogeneous, instable, discontinuous and unjust social realities where we are forced to utilize our moral compass. (my translation)[196]

The problem with the idea of universalism, according to Bhabha, is that it is disconnected and abstracted from the real world of injustices, suppression, instability and process. Much like Aristotle's ethical treaty, ideology and philosophy today that is based on an idea of something definably universal, it is too stabile, too rigid and has too little contact with the realities of our world. Bhabha's theory and criticism is related to Derrida's deconstruction of friendship and democracy in *The Politics of Friendship*, in that it emphasizes the instability of our world as opposed to the stability with which we treat it in language, and how it is necessary to embrace that instability to reach beyond and attempt intimacy instead of distance towards the unfamiliar.

A central aspect in Bhabha's article is translation and "story-telling". (my translation)[197] He is not necessarily referring to translation in the sense the word is most commonly used, but to cultural translation in postcolonial literature, meaning the ability to convey culture and transgress prejudice in aesthetics. Bhabha talks about the culture of "story-telling", the cultural narrative that challenges the established ideas of what a particular culture consists in, of what it means to be a colonial or postcolonial subject; it is a way of transgressing tradition and moving outside the horizon of expectation and conformity.[198] Bhabha's "story-telling" is similar to Rancière's dissensus; it consists in confronting the world of democracy with voices telling stories that challenge the great narrative, and by doing so, introducing new speaking subjects into the common public who thereby claim the right to be heard. The act of speaking always implies a listener. The minority is not just the opposite

[196] Bhabha, «Dialektisk kosmopolitism», 18-19. Original: [d]et är de kulturella skillnadernas närhet och intimitet, inte de väldiga avstånden mellan folk och nationer, som er kommunikationens mest kritiska och krismärkta område. Aziz och Adela försökte skapa ett nytt medium för forståelse som skulle göra det irrelevant för dem att retirera till vissheterna i sina egna kulturella sammanhang […] De bokstavligen «slungas i hop», och det er utifrån detta perspektiv som Forster, själv en uttalad liberal, ifrågasätter verkningsgraden i det jag vil kalla «långdistansliberalism»: det vil säga, när universalismens, toleransens och rättvisans värden framhålls på ett abstrakt sätt som filosofiska ideal eller historiska idèer, bottnar de inte i de heterogena, röriga, diskontinuerliga och orättvisa sociala sammanhang där vi är tvingade att utöva vårt moraliska omdöme.
[197] Bhabha, "Dialektal Kosmopolitism," 19. Original: "berättelse"
[198] Ibid.

of the majority, because to become a part of a minority, you have to speak, "tell". (my translation)[199] On these terms, Bhabha transforms the minority from something negative, the majority's negative opposite, to a positive sign of people using their voice to become part of the democratic public.

The notion of language as crucial to the postcolonial literary expression is supported both in the scholarly reception of *Their Eyes* and in my own reading, which is to follow. In the novel, the language is an aesthetic representation of the lack of voice, the struggle for a voice, the anxiety related to voice, and finally the securing of a voice. The problems related to voice as described in *Their Eyes* is part of the cultural narrative, and portrays the experience of being between cultures. The shifts from high poetic English to eye dialect from the rural parts of the South expresses an experience of anxiety related to the cultural spheres Janie Crawford, the novel and Zora Neale Hurston all moves between. The layering of language used in the novel is a consequence of the cultural hybridity which is the novel's cultural narrative, and that is expressed in the novel's aesthetic.

The ideas presented above all relates to the egalitarianism at the heart of democracy. Boehmer's attempt to define a postcolonial aesthetic is an attempt to find a common ground on which all postcolonial literature can be equal on the basis of the aesthetical aspect of the literature. It hints at a certain universal sameness inherent in all postcolonial literature that becomes problematic when it is tied together with the concept of equality, because it suggests that within a sphere of such difference and diversity as (postcolonial) literature, there has to be sameness if equality is to be made possible. Of course, it is not only in dealing with the postcolonial that the notion of sameness and equality as interdependent is a problem; all literary discourses are diverse, in process and instable, as they are all aesthetic and therefore presents a dissensus to the public. It would thus be equally problematic to claim that one can judge all European literature by the same, universal aesthetic ideals.

3.3.2 Egalitarianism

The egalitarian ideal is a society with universal equality, a society where citizens are born equal to the law and treated equally throughout their lives. Zora Neale Hurston was skeptical of the African American claim for equality in her own time because it looked too much like a claim for sameness to her. She feared that the African American difference, her culture, would be dismantled and changed to the point where it was almost identical to white culture.

[199] Bhabha, «Dialektal kosmopolitism», 22. Original: "Berätta"

Equality is in itself a good thing, but if the price you have to pay to be treated equally is sameness, equality becomes a meaningless phrase, because it indicates that everyone is equal as long as they are the same. *Everyone is equal as long as they are the same* is a meaningless statement, because the opening premise of the sentence "everyone" is contested by the "as long as" and has, by the end of the clause, lost all meaning. What the sentence really says is that there are people who are not equal, and that in itself is a valuable truth that is easily overlooked by Bhabha's 'long-distance liberalism.' Universal equality is impossible, it will always remain an abstract philosophical ideal, but replacing the ideal of universal equality with intimacy can be a productive way to approach the unfamiliar.

The problem with the idea of universal equality in regards to the postcolonial is related to Derrida's critique of the modern democracy in *The Politics of Friendship*; it is difficult to distinguish between equality and sameness. The relationship between the two conceptions is too interdependent; a philosophical and historical bond that is rooted in Antiquity ties them together, and that bond between sameness and equality leaves little room for any form of difference. That is why the aesthetical is important, not as a universal postcolonial aesthetic, but as an expression of a postcolonial experience and as a possibility for intimacy. It is in the aesthetic experience of a literary work that the reader gets closest to a form of intimacy with a cultural narrative that is not their own. In *Their Eyes* it is the use of polyglot language and poetic imagery, the use of rhythm and rhyme in the text - the aesthetics of the novel - that is most interesting in a postcolonial perspective, because those aesthetical elements are the novel's cultural narrative. Hurston was accused of portraying the African American people of the rural South as primitives and animals, but in the novel their speech is heard like voices of human beings, not as the growls of "noisy animals".[200]

[200] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 4.

4 Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)

In this chapter I read and interpret *Their Eyes*. The analysis is presented in chapters and sections, each section dealing with one aspect of the novel that I have found to be of importance to the overall discussion of ethics and aesthetics in the thesis. I will deal with elements related both to the fictional world of *Their Eyes*, such as plot, motifs and themes, and with how these elements are arranged and presented in terms of the aesthetic of *Their Eyes.* Every segment will also contain an interpretation of how the relationship between difference and equality, aesthetics and democracy in relation to the theories that have been described, employed and developed in the previous can be understood in regards to particular aspects and the complete whole of *Their Eyes*.

4.1 The World of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

The novel tells the story of Janie Mae Crawford, an Afro-American woman who struggles to find her place in a society that recently has abolished slavery. It provides an interesting glimpse into the life of a woman who herself never experienced slavery, but whose life is heavily influenced by the past she did not see. The story is set in Florida, as Janie travels from her childhood home in West Florida, to Eatonville, on to Jacksonville, then to the Everglades, and eventually back to Eatonville. As the novel begins, Janie has just returned to Eatonville, and the entire town speculates on the events of her journey. To fend off the curiosity of her neighbors, she tells her friend Pheoby the story of her life, and allows her to pass the story on to the others.

The novel thus takes on the structure of a story telling session, a stylistic choice relevant to the story itself. As a social anthropologist specialized in African American folklore, Zora Neale Hurston travelled the South of the U.S. and to several islands in the Caribbean Ocean, collecting stories passed on orally from generation to generation amongst African American people. She spent large parts of her life listening to, recording and writing down the myths and legends, songs and lies[201] told and sung by her own people. In *Their Eyes*, she has utilized this material, by creating characters that tell some of the stories she heard on her trips. The novel is told as an oral act, contains several examples of traditional African American oral acts and is thematically about the act of speaking, about finding a voice.

[201] This is the word Hurston used when describing the hyperbolic oral activities carried out by Afro-Americans in the South.

When Pheoby comes to Janie to hear what has happened on her journey with Tea Cake, she is interested in just that: Janie and Tea Cake's relationship, where he is now and where they have been together. She wants to hear the love story, but Janie has come to realize that her marriage to Tea Cake was the culmination of her life, the process of becoming herself, not reducible to a simple love story. She therefore feels it necessary to tell her entire story, beginning with her childhood and ending with her marriage to Tea Cake: "So 'taint' no use in me telling you somethin' unless Ah give you de understandin' to go 'long wid it"[202]. This choice indicates that Janie has developed an ability to see herself from the outside, and to reflect over how her life is stringed together by a series of events that led up to Tea Cake, and eventually her return to Eatonville. All her life Janie has waited for a love strong enough to solve the problems in her life, but now that Tea Cake is gone, she has realized that love alone is not enough. This self-reflectiveness sets the tone for what is to come, by indicating that the story about to be told is about personal development.

4.1.1 Plot

Their Eyes is the story of Janie's journey from childhood to selfhood. The novel consists of four different phases; in between childhood and selfhood there are periods of youth and adulthood. The story moves chronologically from Janie's childhood in her grandmother's house, located in a white family called Washburn's backyard, somewhere in West Florida; to her youth in her grandmother's cottage and her first marriage to Logan Killicks; to adulthood in Eatonville as Joe Starks' wife; to selfhood in the Everglades, married to Tea Cake, and then back in Eatonville after Tea Cake's death.

The four phases are contextualized within a narrative frame, as the novel both begins and ends with Janie's return to Eatonville after Tea Cake's death, where she tells the story of her life to her friend Pheoby. The novel has the home – away – home structure of the classical *Bildungsroman*; Janie leaves her home in Eatonville to experience and develop, and returns to Eatonville in the end with new perspectives on life and on herself. It is a coming-of-age story, following Janie's journey from social outcast to self-fulfillment. It is about finding the voice to represent yourself, in your neighborhood, in society and in life.

[202] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 10.

Childhood

Both of Janie's left when she was very young, and she is raised by her grandmother. Until the age of six, Janie is unaware that her skin is of a different color than the Washburn childrens': "Ah was wid dem white chillun so much till Ah didn't know Ah wuzn't white till Ah was round six years old."[203] In a story within the story told by Nanny, it is revealed that Janie's mother's father was a white man. Janie is bullied in her segregated school for resembling the white Washburn children in clothing and manner, and the fact that she is light-skinned does not help the situation. She falls in-between on both the class and race spectrum, as she by appearance is not white, and not black in terms of manner and dress. She is not solely brought up in an African American cultural environment and not solely in a white cultural environment. Janie's cultural hybridity is established as a situation of anxiety in her childhood years, and affects her journey towards self and dissensus, because it is in her childhood that she first learns to view herself as in-between. When Janie is in her youth and about to be married to Logan Killicks, her grandmother expresses a wish to 'class her off', perhaps not realizing that Janie in some ways has been classed off since childhood.

Youth

After being caught kissing a boy at the age of sixteen, Janie's grandmother decides it is time Janie gets married. She arranges for a man called Logan Killicks to marry Janie. Nanny is from another generation than Janie, and grew up in a very different cultural and political environment. Janie has adopted progressive ideas about love and marriage; she does not wish to marry from convenience, but from love. Despite her protests, she is married to Logan Killicks, who owns 60 acres of land and is considered a respectable match. This is the first time Janie's lack of voice, and thereby lack of ability to represent herself and her own interests, has severe impact on her life.

The marriage between Janie and Killicks is loveless. Janie tries to voice her frustration and distress on a visit to her grandmother, but is met with little understanding: "You come heah wid uo' mouf full uh foolishness on uh busy day. Heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo' bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis' Killicks, and you come worryin' me 'bout love."[204] To Janie's grandmother, the most important thing is that Janie is economically safe and well respected, so she diminishes Janie's attempt to speak her mind, and sends her back to Killicks.

[203] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 13.
[204] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 33.

When Nanny dies, Janie no longer needs to fear disappointing her guardian. She meets Joe Starks on the road by Killicks' farm, and agrees to travel with him to Eatonville a few days later, a village built and run by African Americans. Joe Starks represents "change and chance",[205] so Janie leaves Logan Killicks without telling him. The lack of final confrontation or any form of goodbye to Logan Killicks is both a testimony to the marriages' emotional destitution and to Janie's immaturity and lack of belief in her own voice. She does not believe that she has the ability to represent her own ideas and needs, and does not trust her own voice enough to tell Killicks she is leaving him.

Adulthood

Joe Starks is at first described as "a cityfied, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle […]"[206] Janie knows from the beginning that he is not the love she has been dreaming of, as he does "not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees"[207], but she is hoping he will make her happier than Logan Killicks did. They get married on their way to Eatonville, and Joe soon becomes the mayor of the village, and he and Janie lives in a big house and builds and runs a convenience store and a post office.

Despite their success and wealth, Janie is not happy with Joe. As the mayor he has certain ideas of how his wife should dress and behave, and Janie is socially isolated from the rest of the village. Joe demands that she covers up her hair in public, he does not allow her speak unless spoken to, and he does not let her participate in the common activities of the village. During a scene in the store, Janie is prompted by the other men in the village to make a speech, but Joe puts his foot down: "mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home."[208] He treats her like an object for the other villagers to desire and envy, and making a speech in public would humanize and subjectify Janie; make her an individual. To stop that from happening, Joe denies Janie the right to speak, and furthers the lack of representation and voice that have been Janie's situation since childhood.

The marriage is unhappy, but Janie learns to live with it: "The years took all the fight out of Janie's face… No matter what Jody did, she said nothing."[209] She chooses silence to avoid conflict. By now she has come to accept that her voice is a source of trouble, and she

[205] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 42.
[206] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 39.
[207] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 41.
[208] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 60.
[209] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 106.

has given up her status as a subject with a voice to avoid that. However, in the end, the marital unhappiness culminates in a public dispute in the store, where Janie talks back to Joe. She has been suppressed by Joe for many years, and finally has had enough. Soon after, he falls ill, and blames Janie. He believes that it is her speech that has made him ill, that she has cast some kind of spell on him with the pure use of her voice. He fears her voice, maybe has feared her voice all the years they have been married, and continues to deny her to say what she needs to say, by refusing her access to his sickbed. When she finally gets to see him, he dies while she is talking to him, telling him what wrongs he has done her. Unlike with Logan Killicks, she does not let her marriage to Joe Starks end with silence. She has found her voice, and is on the path to selfhood.

Selfhood

Tea Cake appears in Janie's store approximately six months after Joe's death. He makes her laugh, teaches her how to play chess, a game Joe never allowed her to play: "He set it up and began to show her and she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play."[210] He treats her like his *equal*, and they become a couple. Soon Janie leaves Eatonville and travels to Jacksonville to marry Tea Cake. He represents the things Janie has been looking for all her grown life; adventure, love and respect. She is happy because he is willing to share his life with her, and never expects her to be his silent trophy.

They travel together to the Everglades where Tea Cake, and after a while Janie too, picks beans for a living. At first, Janie is busy making a home for them in the cabin they rent, but when that is done, she expects to be involved in the everyday happenings of the Everglades. Tea Cake is surprised that she wants to work, but willingly lets her. He respects her right to speak her mind, her wishes and dreams, and never really questions her decision to go to work alongside him. They are happy, and Janie has finally found what she has been looking for ever since she first married Logan Killicks: "He [Tea Cake] kin take most any lil thing and make summertime out of it when times is dull. Then we lives offa dat happiness he made till some mo' happiness come along."[211]

In her marriage with Tea Cake, Janie has a voice and a right to participate in the community. She is free to be herself, not "classed off" and mystified as she was with Joe

[210] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 133.
[211] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 195.

Starks. However, she is still viewed as different by the other African Americans working in the Everglades:

> ”Tea Cake, you sho is a lucky man,” Sop-de-Bottom told him. “Uh person can see every place you hit her. Ah bet she never raised her hand tuh hit yuh back, neither. Take some uh dese ol’ rusty black women and dey would fight yuh all night long and next day nobody couldn’t tell you ever hit ‘em. Dat’s the reason Ah done quit beatin’ mah woman. You can’t make no mark on ‘em at all. Lawd! wouldn’t Ah love tuh whip uh tender woman lak Janie! Ah bet she don’t even holler. She jus’ cries, eh Tea Cake?[212]

Janie is different from the other women in the Everglades, because she is light-skinned. She is envied for it, and they make jokes about it, but they still treat her like one of their own. The excerpt above is from a conversation between Tea Cake and Sop-de-Bottom. Tea Cake had hit Janie, but Janie had thrown the first punch, and she did ‘holler’ when he hit her. The conversation is of a humoristic nature, held between close friends. However, it does show how Janie still is upheld as somewhat better than the other black women because her skin is a shade lighter.

The Everglades is hit by a hurricane, and during their flight from the natural disaster, a rabid dog bites Tea Cake. He falls ill, and during a fit of rabid rage he tries to shoot Janie. To protect herself from her rabid husband, Janie shoots Tea Cake, who dies. She was accused of killing her second husband with her voice, but it is her third husband, the one she really loves, she actually ends up killing. She is tried for the murder, but acquitted by a jury consisting of only white men, to violent protests from the African Americans of the Everglades, who claims that she was freed because she is light-skinned.

Janie’s difference, which was accepted and appreciated in the Everglades up until the tragic event that led to Tea Cake’s death, is suddenly used against her again, just like it was in school, and in her marriage to Joe Starks. However, this time she does not let other people control how she feels and views herself. She arranges Tea Cake’s funeral, and she appears “in her overalls. She was too busy feeling grief to dress like grief.”[213]Janie invites all of her and Tea Cake’s friends from the Everglades, and they come to pay their respects. Janie does not worry what they think of her or how she appears; she simply acknowledges that they “didn’t understand”.[214] She is assertive and confident, and does not care how she appears to the

[212] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 204.
[213] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 263.
[214] Ibid.

others. After the funeral, she returns to Eatonville, and that is where the story both begins and ends.

Summary

In terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel, *Their Eyes*' plot points towards the future. Everything that happens during the course of the novel is necessary for and validated in the final chapters, where Janie becomes a self-fulfilled subject. However, even as the novel ends, the narrative is structured around the future as the central time coordinate. Janie's return to Eatonville is not a lapse back in time and back to her previous struggles with self and belonging, it is a sign that she is ready to return to the social space that she was excluded from in the past, and demand inclusion and visibility by the power of her voice.

The novel's continuous journey towards a future makes room for the reader's imagination, as both Bakhtin and Martha C. Nussbaum are interested in, because both philosopher's attach significance to reader-participation. Bakhtin is interested in how the possibility of reader-participation is created internally in literature,[215] and Nussbaum is interested in how reader-participation can project compassion through the reader, onto the real world.[216] In *Their Eyes*, the future remains undefined throughout, the reader is never completely sure what direction the story will take, as it is not governed by any external forces such as historical accurateness or mythical discourse. The inherent open-endedness and uncertainty of the plot activates the imagination of the reader, as it conveys a possibility of change. The reader registers Janie's difficult situations, how she is denied a voice and a feeling of belonging, but does not register it as an absolute destiny, and is thereby given freedom to speculate in alternative possibilities that can improve her situation. This is compassionate imagination, according to Nussbaum.[217]

The plot in *Their Eyes* is open, and the reader can therefore enter into a conversation with the novel. At the same time, the movements in the plot, both the physical and psychological journey's that Janie takes the reader on, is also used as a tool to introduce many voices into the plot. These voices give the novel realistic features, as the layered language simulates social and political life in the real world, according to Bakhtin.[218] However, with Rancière's theory of the correlation between the aesthetic and the political,[219]

[215] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 11.
[216] Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 7.
[217] Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 7-8.
[218] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 11.
[219] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 3.

the way in which the many voices in *Their Eyes* are introduced is actually an argument that the novel not only simulates the real world on the plot level, but that the novel should be respected like a real world, because the voices that are introduced in the novel are representations of subjects, forcing their way into the democratic arena of life, that potentially can change the "distribution of the perceptible"[220] in a way that can have effects not only internally in the novel, but externally in the world.[221] The continually developing, future-bound plot in *Their Eyes* is a road towards Janie's "dissensus,"[222] in Rancière's understanding of the term as a form of democratic participation, where subjects enter into the public by speaking and thereby making themselves visible.[223]

4.1.2 Characters

Their Eyes has a quite extensive list of characters. Many of them loom in the background of the story, filling the novel with different voices. These voices may not play an important role in the plot or to the novel's development, but they contribute to the overall structure and aesthetic of the novel, as taletellers. These characters will not be included in this section of the analysis. The characters that are included are those who play a significant part in Janie's process of coming of age and gaining confidence in her own voice; her grandmother and her three husbands. Each character presentation will contain interpretations of how, and on what levels they affect Janie's personal development, or lack thereof. Janie is the main character in the novel, and the other characters most important role is to be a part of her life and contribute to it, in both positive and negative ways. Therefore, they will be presented mostly in terms of how they affect Janie's life, because many of their important character traits are revealed most efficiently by portraying their relationship to Janie.

Janie

Janie is the novel's protagonist. She is not white, but not entirely black either, as her grandfather was a white man. Born as a result of a rape, she is raised by her grandmother in the Washburns backyard, a white family her grandmother works for. Until the age of six, she is unaware of her difference from the white Washburn children. Difference then becomes a recurring aspect of her life, as she struggles to find her place in different social settings

[220] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 4.
[221] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 13.
[222] Rancière, *Dissensus*, 2.
[223] Ibid.

throughout the novel. Janie is a romantic, she wants to experience love and excitement, she wants to travel and experience, and is as such a modern woman at heart. She is not interested in practicality or what Nanny thinks is in her best interest, she wants to be "*any* tree in bloom".[224]

Janie's grandmother wants her to have the safety and freedom she never had: "nothin' Ah been through ain't too much if you just take a stand on high ground lak Ah dreamed."[225] Janie is a complex character, because she is both weak and strong. She obeys her grandmother and Joe Starks, her second husband, and lets them destroy any feeling of belonging to a community or a cultural sphere that she might otherwise have developed. However, she does it with a certain kind of spite, like when her silence in her marriage to Joe Starks slowly turns into a silent rebellion, as Joe Starks himself realizes at his deathbed. [226] Her strength is her patience.

To Janie, unlike to her grandmother and Joe, there is no freedom in being "classed off".[227] Wealth and power cannot replace love and respect in Janie's life, and though Nanny has the best of intentions, her idea of what Janie should do with her life is very far from what eventually makes Janie happy in her marriage with Tea Cake. That is Janie's weakness; she does not challenge the opinions of her Nanny or of Joe Starks. Instead, she patiently waits for them to die, rather than confront them. She does not use her voice to represent her demands and needs, and her patient silence has no effect on either Nanny or Joe Starks. She is therefore efficiently reduced to an object whose voice is not heard in the common public.

With Tea Cake, everything changes, and Janie finally finds a community and a voice. She develops rapidly, and becomes part of the public sphere in the Everglades, and later in Eatonville. Together with Tea Cake, she finds her way back to the peach tree and to the person she sat beneath it and imagined she would become that day in her grandmother's garden.

Nanny

Nanny is Janie's grandmother and guardian. She is an old woman, a matriarchal figure, who has experienced the horrors of slavery, and whose view of the world and of what Janie's role in the world should be is very much colored by her first-hand experience with the suppression of slavery. She does not understand that Janie has other priorities and expectations, and

[224] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 17.
[225] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 24.
[226] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 112.
[227] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 156.

especially she does not understand that Janie's dreams and expectations of life are not only those of a young girl without any understanding or experience of how the world works, but part of the process of emancipation, as a woman and as an African American. Not from slavery, but another form of suppression that Nanny herself has created.

Nanny's view of the world is pessimistic, in her mind, a girl is lucky if she gets to be married at all, and she appears to think that black women must come to terms with their situation as powerless, rather than challenge the system that is treating them unjustly: "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you."[228] But Janie does not want to accept this; she is young and dreams of being a pear tree in bloom,[229] not a mule.

It is through Nanny that Janie, from a very early age, has her difference established. Nanny talks much about how different Janie is, and uses the claimed difference as an argument in any discussion with Janie. After Janie has had her sexual awakening, Nanny's rhetoric of difference becomes even stronger, as she first claims that Janie is too good for the boy she has kissed: "Ah don't want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor usin' yo' body to wipe his foots on."[230] She continues that line of argument when she talks about the "nigger woman" being the "mule uh he world", but adding that she had been praying for Janie to have it different,[231] which in a way is saying that Janie is not a 'nigger woman', but something else. Then, the rhetoric of positive difference is reversed and becomes a rhetoric of negative difference: "But you got to take into consideration you ain't no everyday chile like most of 'em. You ain't got no papa, you might jus' as well say no mama, for de good she do yuh. *You ain't got nobody but me*. "(emphasize added)[232]

Nanny uses Janie's biological and social vulnerabilities and creates or emphasizes already existing differences to maintain power and control over her life. The rhetoric of difference and the need for control exercised by Nanny in Janie's childhood and youth makes Janie uncertain of her voice, this is especially seen in how easily Nanny wins any argument they might have. Janie's history of self-doubt and insecurity begins in her childhood, and is then repeated and strengthened by Janie's husbands later in her life. She is never allowed to control her own life and become part of the common public.

[228] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 21.
[229] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 17.
[230] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 19.
[231] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 21.
[232] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 22.

Logan Killicks

Logan Killicks is Janie's first husband, forced upon her by her grandmother. He is much older than she is, and owns 60 acres of land and a big house. Their marriage is completely loveless, and neither part makes much effort to change that. Already after three days of marriage, Janie visits her grandmother to tell her about the sorry state of her marriage, probably hoping to get comforted or even get permission to leave Killicks. But her grandmother is unwavering in her decision to marry Janie with Killicks, and Nanny sends Janie off "with a stern mien".[233] Six months later, the situation is even worse. Killicks and Janie argues, and Killicks, having been married once before, compares Janie to his first wife and claims that Janie is spoilt.[234]

Logan Killicks reacts to Janie's behavior by confirming the rhetoric of difference used by Nanny: "Ah thought you would 'preciate good treatment. *Thought Ah'd take and make somethin' outa yuh. You think youse white folks by de way you act*" (emphasize added).[235] Like Nanny, Killicks has a particular vision of what Janie should be, and thinks that he can mold her to fit that image. When she turns out to have a mind of her own, he accuses her of acting like white people. Like Nanny, Killicks react to the loss of control over Janie by excluding her from one particular cultural sphere, and calling out a negative, yet undefined difference that Janie, by now, has come to identify with. She is not allowed to belong anywhere, and is denied identification and belonging over and over again, until she no longer understands who she is, and gives up her right to a voice. Logan Killicks is not central to Janie's personal development, but by continuing the negative rhetoric of difference he strengthens Janie's lack of confidence and voice.

Joe Starks

Joe Starks appears on the road by Killicks' farm, and convinces Janie to come with him to Eatonville, a town run and inhabited by African Americans only, which Killicks hopes to become mayor of. He is a stylish man, dressed in expensive clothes, looking "Kind of portly like rich white folks".[236] He can make a rig look like "some high, ruling chair"[237] only by sitting in it. Janie is hopeful, imagining that this marriage will be closer to what she dreamed of before she was married to Killicks: "From now on until death she was going to have

[233] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 33-35.
[234] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 38.
[235] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 43.
[236] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 47.
[237] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 46.

flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom. Her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them."[238] Janie is, at this early stage, happy with her decision to marry Joe. However, the fact that she is already preparing to 'change her words', the way she speaks, indicates that she might, unconsciously be aware of what Joe Starks portly, 'white' manner and almost regal attitude can result in, in regards to her role in the marriage. It is also a testimony to Janie's uncertainty and lack of identification with her own voice; in meeting a man like Joe Starks, Janie immediately sees her voice as something that must be changed to fit his idea of who she should be.

As Janie might have predicted, Joe's portly manner escalates as they get to Eatonville and he gets started on his plan to become mayor of the town. Joe is concerned with appearance, both his own and his wife's, he is vain and proud, and always looking for ways to impress the other people in Eatonville with his wealth and power. Janie is given strict rules of what she can say and where she can speak, and Joe expects her to dress like the queen of Eatonville: "Everybody was coming sort of fixed up, and he didn't mean for nobody else's wife to rank with her [Janie]. She must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang."[239] Joe is the third person in Janie's life to continue the tradition of destroying any feeling of belonging Janie might have, a tradition initiated by her grandmother. Joe Starks is, for a long time, the most successful at controlling Janie's life out of the three, efficiently diminishing her voice and differentiating Janie from everyone else in Eatonville.

Janie and Joe are married for many years, and Joe's need to control both Janie and the entire town of Eatonville does not become any less prominent during the many years of marriage. He sees himself as the natural leader of everything, and after a while Janie surrenders to his world view, because: "he's uh man dat changes everything, but nothin' don't change him."[240] However, Joe does change. He suddenly gets old and sick, and it is apparent for anyone who sees him that his is not young, strong or regal anymore. Joe is aware of the physical changes that have happened to his body, and tries to move attention from his own bodily decay by making fun of Janie in front of everyone who wants to hear, as often as possible. But he is getting weaker, and as time goes by, Janie loses respect for her husband, until one day, she talks back. That is a turning point in the novel, in Janie's life, and in Joe Starks life.

[238] Ibid.
[239] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 57.
[240] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 69.

Janie does probably not realize the impact her spoken rebellion will have on her life in the moment it happens, but after the initial shock, it becomes clear that Janie's speech in the post office has completely torn the ground from under Joe's feet. His illness progresses rapidly, and he isolates himself completely from Janie and the town. He has lost control over his body, his wife and his town, everything that has given meaning to his life is suddenly gone. Joe has depended completely on his ability to demand attention and obedience during his days as mayor of Eatonville, and now that ability has been destroyed: "Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness[…]"[241] He blames Janie for his illness, imagines that she has him under some kind of spell: "it's been singin' round here ever since de big fuss in de store dat Joe was 'fixed' and you wuz de one dat did it."[242] In a desperate attempt to get well, Joe hires a 'root-doctor' to undo the spell Janie is thought to have placed him under. And so, Joe Starks, the man who has spent his life trying to distance himself from the African American cultural sphere by behaving, dressing and demanding like he imagined a white man would, turns to old African American myths and traditions to be freed from the pain of having lost control. Joe dies in his sick bed while Janie is talking to him.

Tea Cake

Tea Cake is Janie's third husband, and much younger than she is. Logan Killicks and Joe Starks belonged mentally to the same generation as Nanny, and imagined Janie as a submissive and grateful housewife. Tea Cake has a different idea of what a woman and a wife is and should be, and as opposed to Killicks and Starks, he does not have money or land, and he is not interested in titles or power. In this relationship, Janie could have taken on the role of her previous husbands, as the older, wiser bread-winner, as Joe Starks left her a great deal of money when he died. However, Tea Cake is not interested in Janie's money. They travel to Jacksonville, gets married and decides to live as if Janie's money did not exist.

Tea Cake is an adventurer, a gambler and a man who does not see problems, but challenges to be overcome. He is not interested in a mellow housewife, and when Janie demands to be informed of, and given the option to come along for, any future adventure, Tea Cake's reaction is not that of a husband who wants his wife to be "classed off",[243] but that of a man in love, who does not want his new wife to see his 'bad' sides: "Befo' us got married

[241] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 111.
[242] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 115.
[243] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 156.

Ah made up mah mind not tuh let you see no commonness in me."[244] His idea of Janie as different does not spring from his own image of what his wife should be in terms of traditional gender roles and power structures, but from his romantic perception of Janie as the perfect woman and wife. He is in love with her, so he perceives her as someone completely different from everyone else, who deserves special treatment.

After the initial romance has died down, Tea Cake continues to treat Janie like his equal. In the Everglades they live and work together, they fight and laugh and dance, and Tea Cake does not try to control Janie's life in any way. He lets her participate in the community, and makes Janie very happy. He is everything that Janie was dreaming of that day under her grandmother's pear tree.

Summary

The extensive use of characters speaking in direct speech with eye dialect in *Their Eyes* thickens the narrative web of the novel by bringing in many different consciousnesses and perspectives, and creates a heteroglossia that ultimately makes the novel more realistic. The voices of the characters represent the characters, it is their actual voices that are heard, and their geographical, cultural and racial belonging, social reality and political opinions are directly represented in their voices, which brings the novel into close contact with a social and political world that is easily recognized by the reader. It is not that the reader necessarily recognizes the particular social and political setting of the novel, but the interaction of characters read like the interaction between human beings.

The layered language of *Their Eyes* efficiently brings the reader's imagination into contact with the world of the novel, because of the element of recognition in the social interaction. The characters create a common public sphere in the novel, and because of the folkloric aspects of the novel, the significant role the African American story telling-tradition plays in both an aesthetic and structural sense, the act of speaking are given added meaning. The characters speak, argue, negotiate and exchange experiences and opinions in direct speech; they become full subjects rather than flat characters by performing the act of speaking, and *Their Eyes* becomes a democratic arena.

The folklore tradition is imbedded in the characters' speech, and provides added fullness to their subject positions, by placing them in a well-defined cultural sphere where culturally determined myths and traditions are continually brought into contact with the

[244] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 173.

emancipated and modernized everyday life of the characters. This merging of the culturally determined traditions and belief systems and the everyday struggles becomes a form of internal cultural translation in the novel, whereby characters consciously reapply their cultural traditions in a setting that is historically far from the cultural sphere in which their traditions were originally created. This internal cultural translation becomes external as the reader becomes a participant in the aesthetic conversation in *Their Eyes*. By reading, the reader is allowed to experience the reality the characters in the novel lives and acts within, and the dissensus they represent, and through this experience the reader becomes a part of the inherent democratic arena in the novel. The characters' voices create the democracy imbedded in *Their Eyes*, and fill it with dissensus.

4.1.3 Motifs

As with every segment in this chapter, also the central motifs presented below are tied to the overall discussion of the thesis, about democracy and aesthetics.

Nature/Love

There are many nature motifs in the novel; the pear tree, the blossoms and bees, spring time, etc. What they all have in common, are that they are used to describe Janie's idea of romance and love. The nature motifs work as Janie's exercise of compare and contrast. With each husband, she ventures back to her sexual awakening under her grandmother's pear tree,[245] and compares her feelings for the three different men she is married to during the course of the novel, to the emotions she experienced during that incident.

The motif of blooming: "Oh to be a pear tree – any tree in bloom!"[246] is central, and takes on added meaning as Janie's path to belonging and self-fulfillment is unraveled throughout the novel. The nature motifs is an abstracted poetic way of communicating Janie's idea of what love is or should be like, and as the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that the nature motifs also signify what Janie wants from her life, not only from love. She wants to be part of something bigger, and that something is continually compared to the eco-system that governs nature, but Janie is denied access to any form of system or community until she meets Tea Cake. As such, Janie's path to selfhood is actually a return to the "maiden language",[247] the words that she learnt under her grandmother's pear tree. The

[245] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 16.
[246] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 17.
[247] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 160.

nature motifs are used to emphasize Janie's distance from her childhood dreams and as a gateway of return to those dreams when Tea Cake appears.

The Community

The community is a motif which most important function is to illustrate Janie's lack of belonging. The community appears first as the Washburn family, where Janie is partially integrated but never fully, because she is not one of the Washburn kids, but the black housekeeper's granddaughter.[248] Then it is the segregated school where Janie is teased by the other kids because she is not 'black enough', which also leads to Janie and her grandmother having to move out of the Washburn house and thus completely disconnecting Janie from the Washburns.[249]

Later on, Eatonville as a community continues to be inaccessible to Janie, not because she does not want to be a part of it, but because Joe Starks does not allow her to be. Eatonville is a tight-knit community, and many of its inhabitants are proud to be a part of it, because it is the first town in the United States that is run and inhabited only by African Americans. Janie feels a natural connection to the story telling traditions of the town, and takes great pleasure in listing to the men talking on the porch of the post office. She does not, however, dare to take part in the community of speech making, because Joe has decided it is below her to engage in the activities of the 'common' people.[250] He does not want her to become part of the common public, because then her dissensus would be heard. At last, Janie becomes a part of the community in the Everglades. However, it takes a while before the others accept her fully. That is at least partially due to the fact that Janie's skin is lighter than most other African American's skin, so for a while many of them suspect her of thinking of herself as better than them.[251] The decision to start working alongside Tea Cake is the turning point for Janie; the moment she turns up in her overalls, ready to pick beans like all the others, she is accepted in to the Everglades community.[252]

The community motif is important, because it is what Janie wants most of all; to be part of a community. It can be seen in the nature motifs as well, in her glorification of the eco-system's inherent co-dependence and respect for each contributing part. Janie imagines that being part of a community and in a relationship of love will be like returning to nature.

[248] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 14.
[249] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 15.
[250] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 98.
[251] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 185.
[252] Ibid.

This can be compared to returning to subject status, as Janie's lack of belonging and voice is made possible by people who treat her like an object. By becoming part of a community, at first only consisting of her and Tea Cake, Janie is able to become 'natural' again, a living human being with a voice.

Race/Racism

The question of race and racism in the traditional sense of white versus black is not present in *Their Eyes.* That is probably largely due to the fact that the novel is about a black woman moving between black communities. The only white characters in the novel are the Washburn family, and they are only present for a very short period of time early in the novel. However, that does not mean that race is not an issue in *Their Eyes*. In many instances, the prejudice Janie experiences in relation to different people and communities stems solely from the fact that she is not as dark-skinned as most African Americans. She experiences a form of racism, based on the color of her skin, within the African American cultural sphere, because she is not 'black enough'. Several times throughout the novel, Janie is accused of acting as if she was white.[253]

The race motif is used in a way in *Their Eyes* that was very uncommon in the time the novel was written, when authors usually focused on interracial racism. In *Their Eyes*, a form of intraracial racism is portrayed, a concept which has recently become more common as a theme in literature and public debates. Janie is subjected to suppression and discrimination because her skin is a shade too light, but she is also treated with something that can be mistaken for respect because of this lightness. In reality, the kind of respect she receives because of her skin tone is almost always spiteful or ironic, and works as an effective way of excluding her from the communities she approaches during the course of the novel. She is envied and 'classed off', and denied the feeling of belonging because of the intraracial racism, which is seen in all the different communities she attempts to take part in during the novel.

The racism Janie experiences can range from humoristic teasing to complete exclusion from communities based on the color of her skin. Her light skin tone is used as a weapon in Nanny, Logan Killicks and Joe Starks' fight to keep Janie a submissive and silent object of flattery and envy. Whenever she does something that is not in keeping with either of the three's vision of how Janie should behave, the lightness of her skin is brought up as a

[253] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 43.

negative explanation for the behavior. Her skin, like her voice, comes to signify trouble, and this pattern of association ensures that Janie is not only lacking a sense of community or cultural belonging, but a belonging to herself.

The Mule

The mule is a reoccurring motif in *Their Eyes*. It first appears in the already cited speech made by Nanny, of how the 'nigger woman' is the 'mule of the world'. This metaphor takes on added meaning as Matt Bonner's mule is introduced. The yellow mule and its owner is one of the favorite subjects for the men in Eatonville to talk about and make fun of. The characters Sam, Lige and Walter are the "ringleaders of the mule-talkers".[254] Janie experiences a form of identification with the mule, which grows particularly strong when the mule is dying: "They oughta be shamed uh theyselves! Teasin' dat poor brute beast lak they is! Done been worked tuh death; done had his disposition ruint wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish devilin' 'im to death. Wisht Ah had mah way wid 'em all."[255] Janie feels for the mule, she expresses a form of sympathy that is rooted in her recognizing parts of herself in the animal: she too has been made fun of; she too has been mistreated and denied basic rights, such as speaking. She has been reduced to the "noisy animal";[256] her voice has not been recognized as the voice of a subject, so she sees herself in the mule.

The mule motif is not only important to the plot, where Janie's identification with the mule forces her to consider the life she is living and the way she is allowing her husband to treat her, ultimately leading to the turning point when she talks back to Joe in public, and thereby enters into the common public.[257] The mule is also a traditional motif from the African American folklore Zora Neale Hurston collected as a social anthropologist. Her first non-fictional folklore book was entitled *Mules and Men*, and contains two stories entirely dedicated to the mule,[258] and several of the other texts in the book involved the mule in some way. The mule is usually portrayed as mistreated and skinny, just like in *Their Eyes*, but it is still a force to be reckoned with because of its stubbornness and wit. In the stories in *Mules and Men*, the mule usually ends up tricking everybody, and like in "The Talking Mule", it is not uncommon for the animal to have human traits, like the ability to talk. The mule is often considered stupid and useless by humans and other animals, but turns out to be the smartest

[254] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 71.
[255] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 79.
[256] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 4.
[257] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 81-105.
[258] "Why They Always Use Rawhide on a Mule" and "The Talking Mule".

of them all. Janie's identification with the mule, and what it eventually leads to, is not a coincidence.

Summary

The four motifs I choose to focus on are all related through Janie's path to subject status. They are reoccurring, and they contribute to the overall aesthetic of *Their Eyes*. Especially nature/love and the mule are motifs that are important to the language of the novel. Nature/love is mostly present in the narrator's poetic English, and is a modernist motif that invokes themes such as culture/nature and subject/object. The mule is a representation of the African American folklore; it is governed by a different poetic than the nature/love motif, but it plays a similarly important role in Janie's process of subject development, by being the element that triggers Janie's epiphany about the life she has accepted to live with Joe Starks.

Throughout the novel the motifs presented below are loose threads in Janie's existence. It is clear from the beginning that they will be important, but they are portrayed as singular parts of a larger journey towards the future. By the end, they are gathered, as Janie returns to her 'maiden language' in a community. The four motifs represent different areas of life that Janie struggles with, and they are all related to the question of voice and the ability to use that voice to become part of a common public.

The motifs are structured in a way that puts the novel into contact with a present by never become stabile points of entry or clearly defined goals for the story. They are used as literary images that can be both positive and negative; they carry with them the novel's open-endedness. The community is both a place of anxiety and a place Janie longs for. The mule is both the negative representation of the 'nigger woman', and an image of emancipation. The motifs are juxtaposed, and their symbolic meanings are continually changed back and forth between the poles of negativity and positivity as the story progresses. The instability of the motifs creates further openings in the text where the reader can access the story and make conversation, and the technique also creates conversation within the novel, as the different motifs are viewed from different perspectives by the voices in *Their Eyes*.

4.2 Stylistic Analysis

4.2.1 Narrative Perspective

Their Eyes is told from a third-person point of view, with much direct speech. Janie tells the story of her life in direct speech, and the narrator creates a frame work for the story with the

third-person perspective. This narrative organization is made clear in the first and last chapter of the novel. The third-person point of view creates distance between Janie and the narrating voice. The narrator does not only account for Janie's thoughts and feelings, but does also give insight into other characters' psychology. One example of this occurs when Janie has kissed Johnny Taylor outside her grandmother's house: "In the last stages of Nanny's sleep, she dreamed of voices. Voices far-off but persistent, and gradually coming nearer."[259] The narrating voice enters Nanny's dream, and records what is happening on a psychological level. Janie does not have access to any other mind than her own, and only records what is directly said and done by her and the other characters.

The narrative voice is autodiegetic. This narrative choice emphasizes the gap between the narrator and Janie, even though Janie is presented as the one telling the story in the conversation with Pheoby in the first chapter of the novel, as Janie does not have the ability to access any other mind than her own. They have two different voices, and perform two different roles in the novel. Janie is the eyes on the ground, the focal point that the narrating voice is representing the action through. This creates a complex narrative structure, with two different voices claiming to be one and the same, but in reality bringing two different perspectives, one subjective and one objective, into the novel, both pretending to be Janie. The subjective voice *is* Janie; the objective voice is the narrator, disguised as Janie.

The double voice of *Their Eyes* develops and changes with the novel's and Janie's progress. In the beginning, the objective and authorial voice of the narrator is dominant, using its authorial power to reach into different character's psychology and taking the lead in the story, telling it in its own voice in poetic high English. During Janie's two first marriages, the narrator's objective point of view dominates, and Janie's subjective voice is rarely heard in other ways than as the recorder of other voices. Gradually, however, Janie becomes more vocal. The first sign of the change in narrative perspective occurs when Janie talks back to Joe in their store.[260] Up until this point, Joe has forbidden Janie to speak unless necessary when in public, but after having been bullied by Joe for some time, she finally has had enough. Soon after, Joe dies while Janie is talking to him, and from the on her voice gradually takes over for the objective narrator and becomes the dominant voice in the novel.

As Janie's voice becomes stronger, the authorial objective narrator withdraws from the story. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator has lost most of its authorial power. In the trail after Tea Cake's death, it refrains from entering any other minds than Janie's: "Then

[259] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 17.
[260] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 111.

he and Prescott whispered together and both of them talked to the judge *in secret* […](emphasis added)".[261] The thoughts and whispers of the other characters have become secret, they are no longer available or necessary to report to the objective narrator, as Janie has taken over the story and is filling it with her own voice. The objective narrator is still present, but it is no longer the dominant voice.

The narrative perspective and the complex organization of voices in *Their Eyes* creates a multi-layered language, a heteroglossia, that ensures that the novel closes in on a reality the reader can participate in, despite the fact that the novel is told in a third-person perspective. This perspective could have led to a readerly experience of something past, something already determined and finished because of the external voice of the narrator, but the use of direct speech stops that from happening by creating real-time voices that engage the reader in the action.

The narrator's voice and the subjective voices are juxtaposed throughout the *Their Eyes*, which both emphasizes the difference and the respective poeticism of the objective and the subjective. When the narrator is overpowered by the voices speaking in direct speech in the end of the novel, the cultural hierarchy of educated/uneducated and high culture/low culture is overturned, enhancing the dissensus of the subjective voices of Janie and the other subjects in *Their Eyes*. By subverting the narrating voice and letting the voices of the characters, that far outnumber the narrator, take its place and tell their own story, the novel becomes a democratic arena.

4.2.2 Language and Rhetoric

The novel's language marks the break between Janie and the narrating voice. When Janie speaks, she speaks in direct speech with a thick, Southern dialect, portrayed in writing with eye dialect. The narrating voice on the other hand, speaks in correct English, without the culturally and regionally conditioned dialect used by Janie to convey hers and the other character's speech. The diverging use of language in *Their Eyes* creates two different aesthetic expressions, and several layers of voices. It separates the subjective voice from the objective, making the objective voice a frame for the subjective ones to act within. As previously mentioned, Janie's subjective voice gradually becomes the dominant one, and accordingly, her dialectal and sociolectal English is heard more often.

[261] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 260.

The narrator's voice is poetic in a traditional sense; the language used is rich and full of poetic imagery and metaphors:

> She was stretched out on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming with delight. So this was a marriage![262]

Janie's voice on the other hand is, as mentioned previously, is written in a Southern and culturally specific dialect or sociolect.[263] The language she and the other characters use reflects their geographical and cultural belonging. The rhythm of and the words used in the spoken or thought sections and dialogues in the novel differ from the narrator's sections, and this is especially evident in some of the story telling sessions that takes place:

> Dey caught him over dere in Eg*ypt*. Seem lak he used tuh hang round dere and eat up dem Pharaos' tombstones. Dey got de picture of him doin' *it*. Nature is high in uh varmint lak dat. Nature and salt. Dat's whut makes up strong man lak Big John de Conquer. He was uh man wid *salt in him*. He could give flavor to *anything*. (emphasize added)[264]

This is example is from one of the story telling sessions in *Their Eyes*. These sessions are for the most part carried out by male characters, and is a sort of talking competition were the participants try to trick each other by laying out verbal traps, or simply out-talk the opponent. Rhythm, and the ability to keep talking without pausing to think, no matter how far fetch the subject might be, appears to be the most important rules of the game. Though this spoken language is very different from the one used by the narrator, it follows its own poetic rules, and has a significant rhythmical quality, as emphasized in the above quotation. This poetic rhythmical quality is important from a cultural perspective: "Long before the year was up, Janie noticed that her husband had stopped talking in rhymes to her."[265] "Joe didn't make many speeches with rhymes to her […]"[266] The rhyme here becomes a symbol of love, and

[262] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 16.
[263] I use the word sociolect in addition to dialect because the way Janie speaks is not only determined by her geographical location, but also by her social class, and racial and cultural belonging.
[264] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 93.
[265] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 37.
[266] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 47.

creates an accurate picture of the importance of rhyme in the particular cultural setting of *Their Eyes*.

There are two languages in use in *Their Eyes.* The narrator's language, which is traditional both in the sense that it complies with standard American-English rules of writing, and in the sense that it resembles what one might call the favored form of modern Western fictional prose. Hurston utilizes many different poetic techniques to create a language that is rich and diverse, and ultimately in compliance with the modern, or even modernist, European and Anglo-American fictional prose tradition. Janie's language however, being purely dialectal and sociolectal, diverges from this tradition. Her voice is the voice of another aesthetic regime.

There are differences in the rhetoric used in the narrator's language and Janie's language. The difference stems from the mentioned dissimilitude in aesthetic regimes employed by the two voices. Janie's rhetoric is influenced by the fact that her voice is an idiomatic spoken voice. It lacks the refinement of the scholarly and elaborate poetic language of the narrator. However, it is a rich and diverse language, full of life and color. The narrator breathes life into the language by taking thoroughly thought out, scholarly rhetorical technical measures, creating a traditionally aesthetic language. As Janie's idiomatic language gives voices to the many characters of *Their Eyes*, her voice comes to *represent* life within the narrative frame.

The narrator uses a great deal of rhetorical techniques to convey the story of Janie Crawford's life to the reader. There are similes: "The morning road air was like a new dress"[267], metaphors: "From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything"[268] and sound patterns: "When the people sat around on the porch and passed around pictures of their thoughts […]"[269], and these are just some of the techniques used in the lavish language of the narrator. The lavish language creates an equally lavish setting for the characters to live within, by making even the small details of life in Eatonville, and the other areas of Florida visited in the novel, into poetic images. Events like the sun's daily morning routine is described like a small wonder: "Every morning the world flung itself over and exposed the town to the sun."[270] The narrator uses much of poetic imagery throughout *Their Eyes*, and this aestheticizes the realities of Eatonville and creates a three-dimensional poetic space in which Janie can live and act.

[267] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 46.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 71.
[270] Ibid.

The sections written in rural Southern black eye dialect is not necessarily a contrast to the narrator's aesthetic. The direct speech smooths the transitions from the descriptive to the subjective, and that is partly why the gap between Janie and the narrator sometimes come close to disappearing, especially towards the end of the novel. However, there is one rhetorical technique that dominates Janie's voice that is not as much used by the narrator, and thus separates the two voices. Janie and the other characters' speech are filled with hyperbole. They use it predominantly in the story telling sessions, but their story telling sessions and their daily talk have many similarities.

There are several examples of this use of hyperbole in *Their Eyes,* and much of it occur during social gatherings on the front porch of Janie and Joe's store in Eatonville. One of the funniest and clearest examples of this rhetoric involves a mule and its owner Matt Bonner: "Worser'n dat. De womenfolks got yo' mule. When Ah come round the lake 'bout noontime mah wife and some others had 'im flat on de ground usin' his sides fuh uh wash board."[271] Matt Bonner's mule his both very aggressive and very skinny, but the women were not using him as a wash board. The purpose of this sort of humoristic use of hyperbole is first and foremost entertainment. However, it also contributes to making the realities of life in Eatonville easier to handle. Matt Bonner's mule is skinny because it is not fed enough, and it seems reasonable to assume the reason he is not fed is Bonner's economic situation. The hyperbolic talk enlarges the unpleasant realities of life, and enables the villagers to laugh at situations that otherwise might be difficult to discuss. The rhetoric of the hyperbole, the "crayon enlargements of life"[272] represents a short escape from life's hardships, and reflects the characters' appreciation of imaginative possibility and freedom to make what you want out of what you have.

Again, *Their Eyes* has two voices. The narrator's rhetorical strategy is aesthetical; it aims to make the world of the novel beautiful by using poetic techniques to emphasize the wonders of the small details of everyday life. The voice is descriptive, seeing and hearing almost everything, and thus creating an environment that is poetic and lavish. Janie's rhetoric breathes life into the novel. The narrator creates the environment, but it is Janie and her characters that bring the novel's world together. The two rhetorical strategies are similar in that both of the voices enlarge the little things, but the narrator does it to aestheticize the world of the novel, and Janie does it to portray the realities of life and make the representation of the culture and society tangible, translatable to the reader. The aesthetic

[271] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 72-3.
[272] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 70.

value of her rhetoric is a result of the inherent beauty of her cultural voice, unpolished and raw, but rhythmical and poetic. The narrator's rhetoric is aesthetical in a scholarly sense; it is the voice of high culture and education. The two rhetorics are discreetly played up against each other, and gradually, Janie takes control of the story, undermining the power of the narrator's rhetorical strategy.

The combination of these two languages creates a world that is realistic in the sense that the world is depicted and then filled with subjects who acts as subjects, meaning that they represent themselves with their own voices in direct speech. The technique ensures that the story can be experienced as a present, which make readerly engagement almost a necessity, because the presentness of the novel activates the imagination. The novel travels in the direction of the future, and the reader is asked to come along for a journey without a clearly defined ending.

When the narrator begins to lose power, it is by an act of democratic dissensus, as the characters become empowered to tell their own story without the narrator stepping in to build a world around it as often. They are enabled as cultural translators, and Janie becomes a subject able to translate her own existence into a sense of belonging. This reads as a form of emancipation from the cultural hierarchy of high and low that is juxtaposed in the bringing together of the two aesthetic regimes in *Their Eyes*.

4.3 Themes and Interpretation

4.3.1 Themes

Their Eyes is about Janie, and that is particularly evident in the themes of the novel. All the themes that I choose to present here are aspects of life that severely affect Janie's path to selfhood. Her quest for true love, her struggle with language and self-representation, and ultimately her emancipation from the negative rhetoric of difference. The three themes presented are closely related, as Janie gradually realizes she cannot have one without the others.

Love

In Janie's journey towards selfhood, her quest for a voice happens parallel with the quest for true love. It is the lack of love in the marriage between Janie and Joe Starks that lead to Janie's public speech about Joe's appearance, which leads to Janie's realization that her life is nothing like she dreamed it would be, which leads to the final confrontation at Joe's

deathbed. True love is closely tied to the idea of the "maiden language",[273] the language of nature. Janie believes that love is the key to self-fulfillment, and it is ultimately in her marriage to Tea Cake that she finds her voice, but when Tea Cake dies, she has to reevaluate the meaning she has attached to the idea of being a couple. She has realized that love is not something that can change your life on its own: "[l]ove ain't somethin' lak uh grindstone dat's de same thing everywhere and do de same thing tuh everything it touch. Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore."[274] You cannot expect love alone to provide you with a voice and a sense of belonging, because each love is shaped between the people in love, and if they are not ready to love with respect and confidence in themselves and in the other, love will not save them from their lack of selfhood. Love is not necessary for self-fulfillment, but selfhood is necessary for a love to live on, because you need to be able to represent yourself in the relationship. That is what Janie has learnt from her marriage to Tea Cake.

Language

Language is probably the most striking aspect of *Their Eyes*, aesthetically, structurally and thematically. Throughout the novel, language is thematized as the main source of problems in Janie's life, both in the sense she herself expresses it:"Ah hates disagreement and confusion, so Ah better not talk. It makes it hard tuh git along.",[275] and in the sense that her lack of confidence and negative pattern of association with own voice puts her in situations where she is defenseless against Nanny, Logan Killicks and Joe Stark's attacks on her person. Janie lets these tree people deprive her of her right to defend and represent herself, because she has been indoctrinated with the rhetoric of negative difference since childhood, and has no confidence that her voice will cause anything but 'disagreement and confusion'.

It is in the thematization of language that Janie's lack of belonging, lack of voice and her difference is expressed in *Their Eyes*, as Janie's 'maiden language' is diminished by her grandmother, Logan Killicks and Joe Starks, because that language does not fit with their expectations of what role she should play in their lives. To Janie, language is not just a means of expression that she has had taken away by significant persons in her life; it is a combat zone that she does not dare enter into until she sees signs of weakness in Joe. Up until that

[273] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 160.
[274] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 266.
[275] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 80.

moment in the store, Janie has waited patiently for Nanny to die, and run away from Logan Killicks without a word, consistently avoiding vocal confrontation all her life.

Freedom

There are several other underlying themes of *Their Eyes* that has not been mentioned here, because freedom seems to embody most of them, included language and love. What Janie wants, is freedom. She wants to be free from the expectations of her grandmother, Logan Killicks, Joe Starks and the town of Eatonville, she wants to emancipate herself from the negative rhetoric of difference that has been used against her all her life, and she wants to be relieved from the role as object for other people's envy and spite. All of this is achieved when Janie finds the voice to represent herself and becomes a subject in the common public in the scene in the store with Joe. In her voice, she finds the confidence to ignore the opinions of the other people in Eatonville and trust her heart, gut and mind in decisions regarding her life.

When she returns to Eatonville, she has lost Tea Cake, but she has gained wisdom and a voice, and she is ready to spend the rest of her life honoring her own development through the memory of Tea Cake: "So Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin sit heah in mah house and live by comparisons. Dis house ain't so absent of things lak it used tuh be befo' Tea Cake come along. It's full uh thoughts, 'specially dat bedroom."[276] She has become a self-sufficient subject, and the material wealth she inherited from Joe Starks is nothing compared to the emotional wealth she has gained with Tea Cake.

Janie's quest for freedom is closely linked to speech and silence throughout *Their Eye*, also in the structural aesthetic of the novel. As previously shown, Janie's voice grows stronger as the novel progresses, until she is close to making the narrating third-person perspective's authoritative power obsolete, as Janie becomes the only perspective that is used by the narrator. Janie's path to freedom is completed, she has presented herself to the public in full, and now she can continue living her life as fulfilled subject with the memory of Tea Cake keeping her subject alive: "He [Tea Cake] could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking."[277]

[276] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 266.
[277] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 268.

4.3.2 Interpretation

Their Eyes has been read predominantly with attention to feminist perspectives in the last thirty year's critical reception. Many scholars have been interested in Hurston's use of silence and speech, and read it as a feminist project within the novel. I argue that the use of speech and silence is directly transferrable to the discussion of democracy in literature. Janie's lack of voice or ability to use it during her first three stages of development, childhood, youth and adulthood, reduces her attempts to speak to the "growls of a noisy animal".[278] When she finds her voice, changes in the distribution of the perceptible occur in the plot, as Janie finds a social space together with Tea Cake where she is no longer marginalized, and on the structural level of the novel, where Janie's voice replaces the narrator's voice as the dominant one.

Dissensus, and the right to express it, is a significant theme in the novel. *Their Eyes* represents dissensus externally by forcing new subjects into the common public by presenting the Southern African American characters as people with voices. Internally, democratic praxis is portrayed with complexity, as Joe Starks takes on the role of mayor in what can hardly be called an election,[279] and continues to rule the town of Eatonville, without any reelection and in a less than democratic fashion, until his death. Joe Starks owns both the convenience store and the post office, and much of the land Eatonville consists of. He is wealthy and powerful, and nobody dares to challenge him on his ideas or his actions. Eatonville was, before Joe Starks appeared, run on a form of direct democracy, built on trust and belief that "everybody's grown […]"[280] and therefore can take care of the things that need to be taken care of, without a single person controlling how it happens or when. The possibility of public dissensus is almost completely eliminated with Joe Starks as mayor, because he holds so much power, both materially and psychologically.

Janie is the most vulnerable victim of Joe Stark's way of governing the town and their marriage, which is almost identical. He expects her to support him in silence, and be the face of his success in their convenience store and post office. What little confidence she had in her voice when she married Joe is soon completely diminished, as Janie is efficiently reduced to an object of desire and envy in Joe's power game. With her good looks and particularly her light skin, she is the perfect trophy wife, because she looks different from the other African Americans which inhabit Eatonville. Joe uses the intraracial prejudice of the community to

[278] Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 4.
[279] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 60.
[280] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 49.

strengthen his position as the ruler of the town, and Janie is not recognized as anything beyond being the mayor's pretty, light-skinned wife.

However, Janie's journey towards becoming a subject present in the common public, a participator in the democratic dissensus, is not only a feminist project, because she is not only a woman. She is part of the African American history of suppression, but she is not allowed to enter that cultural sphere fully because of her light skin. She falls between cultural spheres because she is accepted as neither black nor white, and she does not, for a very long time, have the confidence that her voice will represent her needs, because her voice has been manipulated by the people close to her since childhood. As such, Janie's quest for a voice is a quest for the right to be a subject, a human being participating in the common public, and claim her place in the African American historical narrative. When she does find her voice, the distribution of the perceptible is changed, and she and others can see her as a fully formed subject.

This shift in the distribution of the perceptible happens in the aesthetics of *Their Eyes*, as the objective narrating voice gets less authoritative towards the end of the novel. Janie does not need as much help telling the story of her life as she did in the beginning, the shifting perspectives of the narrator become superfluous as Janie herself is able to step forward and encompass both the aestheticism and the reality of her story. This change in the organization of the narrative, the joining together of the aesthetic and the 'real' (political) is an example of why it is necessary to see the two aspects of literature as interdependent. They both present a dissensus, but the dissensus can be expressed even stronger if the aesthetic and the political are combined, as they are in *Their Eyes.* The initial separation between the narrative of aesthetics and the narrative of politics, and the final joining of the two are both representations of a democratic process; stages of the distribution of the perceptible.

Their Eyes is an act of cultural translation in the sense Bhabha expresses in the lecture that was the basis of the article "Vernacular Cosmopolitism", as presented in the previous chapter on the politics of reading. It presents the story of a life in between, of a cultural and racial hybridity that is impossible to comprehend in terms of a traditional white/black or aesthetical/political perspective. It shuts down any possibility of accessing the novel through binary oppositions, and challenges the notion of stability, by relying on a double narrative with two very different aesthetic regimes that contradicts and juxtaposes the concept of high and low with regards to art.

The inaccessibility which both the modernist aestheticism and the use of eye dialect contribute to in the novel, demand a reader's complete attention, and emphasize the

imaginative process of reading by creating room for the reader to experience with the novel. The reader is challenged to leave any preconfigured ideas of what cultural hybridity can signify in the context of politics behind, because of the novel's strong aesthetic voices, which triggers a form of experience-based reading rather than logocentric understanding. The aestheticism situates the reader within the sphere of experience and enables the political to spring from that perspective. Therefore, reading *Their Eyes* with a purely political orientation will reduce the novel to utility, because its main voice of dissensus springs from the aestheticism. The ethical way of approaching this is by acknowledging the aesthetics of the novel as a dissensus in itself, and seeing how the political voices arise from the aesthetical elements in the work of art. The act of reaching beyond the stability of the democratic concept of sameness is prompted by the aesthetics of contradiction within *Their Eyes*, not only in the sense of dissensus between different characters in society, but also in the aesthetic resistance the text offers its readers.

5 Conclusion

The relationship between aesthetics and politics is a complex matter, especially when it is fused in the way I have claimed it is in *Their Eyes*. I believe that all literature, in different ways depending on genre, publication period and other factors that affects how the literary aesthetic sphere is established, relies on situating the reader in an aesthetic space to enhance *the experience of reading*, and that the readerly awareness of the political or ideological aspects of literature is entirely dependent on this situating of the reader in the aesthetical space, but that this part of the reading process is commonly overlooked or underappreciated in the scholarly discourse.

I also believe that this attitude towards the aesthetic study of literature as a 'sidetrack' is particularly widespread in the postcolonial discourse, because the postcolonial movement often has let a strong political motivation drive the reading process. Aristotle believes that a good friendship, like a good society, will politically self-regulate, because the involved subjects are equal and have equal rights. It will be a friendship or society of complete openness, where all participants have the same right to express themselves and be part of the public sphere. As such, Aristotle's good friendship can be interpreted as the ideal, but probably impossible, distribution of the perceptible. The Aristotelian ethics can be understood as the basis of a society where everyone is visible. That is why I found it necessary to employ ethics as a form of golden mean, so that the process of reading does not only move between the imagined polarities of aesthetics and politics, but is triangulated through an ethical perspective.

By doing so, I have found grounds to argue that the politically motivated reading is both reductive and unethical, in the sense that this form of scholarly criticism is based on an idea of utility. As such it is similar to the Aristotelian friendship of utility. By reading to find support for a political struggle, we use literature as means for achieving *our* vision, without giving anything back in terms of letting ourselves be situated by the literature, or honoring the aesthetic premise that is the foundation of literature as art. Aesthetics is a powerful force, it is what makes possible the reaching beyond or behind what is familiar, as described by Derrida and Bhabha, and it is therefore of importance that the scholarly criticism on postcolonial literary production does not diminish the value of aesthetics because its value to their cause is not directly transferrable to the real world.

The readerly imagination and aesthetics are interdependent, and it is in the imagination that the reader has the possibility to enter into a teleiopoetic process of exchange.

As aesthetics represents a dissensus as well, a teleiopoesis is not an other-worldly experience, but an experience that is directly connected to the world we live in through the act of being a dissensus. Literature is a democratic arena which has the potential to present its readers with an alternate reality that is not necessarily unreal, but unfamiliar, and invite the reader to participate in the conversation so as to form an experience that can change how we understand the real world. Literature as art should be taken seriously, because it can change the distribution of the perceptible, both for the reader and for the objects which are transformed into subjects by being allowed to tell their story and having their voices heard.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes* deserves to be acknowledged for the democratic effort it presented when it was first published, and still does today. The novel is both an act of cultural translation and of dissensus, and I have tried to show that it is in the aesthetic space that these two processes happen, simultaneously. The novel allows for African American voices of the rural South to be heard in a way they had never been heard before, and this is achieved by reclaiming the eye dialect and placing it in an aesthetic and cultural space where the voices belong, where they are human beings who "eat and laugh and cry and work and kill",[281] subjects in the common public.

I hope this thesis will present something new, both to the scholarly discourse on *Their Eyes* and to the scholarly discourse on postcolonial aesthetics, and most of all I hope that my perspective on the ethical reading process will spark some form of awareness in the reader of this thesis. Ethics is the practical approach to how to be the best human being possible, and that includes being the best reader possible. To be a good reader, I believe it is necessary to respect the founding premise of literature, namely that it is art. Aesthetics is not a sidetrack, it is the opening that literature creates for us as readers, where we can glimpse the world through an alternative perspective. That is politics in action.

[281] Richard Wright, *New Masses*, 1937: (http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam358/wrightrev.html). [Accessed 17.04.2015.]

Bibliography

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Ed. and trans. C. J. Rowe and Sarah Broadie.

Bachtin, Michail, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson.

Belsey, Catherine. *Desire. Love Stories in Western Culture*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994.

Benesch, Klaus. "Oral Narrative and Literary Text: Afro-American Folklore in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Callaloo*, 36 (1988): 627-35.

Bhabha, Homi. "Dialektal Kosmopolitism." *Glänta*, 3 (2001): 16-26.

Boehmer, Elleke. "A Postcolonial Aesthetic: Repeating Upon the Present" in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*. London: Routledge, 2010. Ed. Janet Wilson, *et al*.

Burn, Shawn Meghan, *et al.* "The Relationship Between Gender, Social Identity and Support for Feminism". *Sex Roles* 42 (2000): 1081-89.

Crabtree, Claire. "The Confluence of Folklore, Feminism and Black Self-Determination in Zora Neale Hurston's "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*"." *The Southern Literary Journal* 17, 2 (1985): 54-66.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Politics of Friendship*. London: Verso, 1997. Trans. George Collins.

Dilbeck, Keiko. "Symbolic Representation of Identity in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *The Explicator* 66, 2 (2008): 102-04.

Dubek, Laura. "“[J]Us’ Listenin’ Tuh You”: Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the Gospel Impulse." *The Southern Literary Journal* 41, 1 (2009): 109-30.

Felski, Rita. *Uses of Literature*. Blackwell Manifestos. Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2008.

Ferguson, SallyAnn. "Folkloric Men and Female Growth in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Black American Literature Forum* 21, 1/2 (1987): 185-97.

Gaál-Szabó, Peter. "Ah Done Been Tuh De Horizon and Back":Zora Neale Hurston's Cultural Spaces in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2011.

Gaál-Szabó, Peter. ""They Got Tuh Find out About Livin' Fuh Theyselves": Female Places and Masculine Spaces in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*." *The AnaChronisT* (2011): 80.

Gaál-Szabó, Péter. "Liminal Places and Zora Neale Hurston's Religio-Cultural Space in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 19, no. 1 (2013): 101-20.

Gardsjord, Tone Gjul. ""Where're You Bound?": Migration in Search of Home and Idenity in *Home to Harlem, Quicksand,* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." University of Oslo: Master's thesis, 2005.

Greene, Brenda M. "Addressing Race, Class, and Gender in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: Strategies & Reflections." *English Education* 27, 4 (1995): 268-76.

Haddox, T. F. "The Logic of Expenditure in 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' (Zora Neale Hurston)." *Mosaic-J. Interdiscip. Study Lit.* 34, 1 (2001): 19-34.

Hamnen, Haldis. "The Role of Racism and Sexism in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Alice Walker's *Meridian*, and Toni Morrison's *Sula*." University of Oslo: Master's thesis, 1988.

Hemenway, Robert E. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. Chicaco: University of Illinois Press, 1980.
Hubbard, Dolan. "" '... Ah Said Ah'd Save De Text for You' ": Recontextualizing the Sermon to Tell (Her) Story in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *African American Review* 27, 2 (1993): 167-78.
Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000.
Hurston, Zora Neale. *Mules and Men*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.
Ikard, David. "Ruthless Individuality and the Other(Ed) Black Women in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *CLA Journal* 53, 1 (2009): 1-22.
Jullum, Vibeke. "Revolutionary Petunias: Rebel Women in Novels by Larsen, Hurston, Morrison, and Walker." University of Oslo: Master's thesis, 2004.
Korobkin, Laura H. "Legal Narratives of Self-Defense and Self-Effacement in 'Their Eyes Were Watching God.'" *Studies in American Fiction* 31, 1 (2003): 3.
Kubitschek, Missy Dehn. ""Tuh De Horizon and Back": The Female Quest in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Black American Literature Forum* 17, 3 (1983): 109-15.
Kunitz, Stanley and Haycraft, Howard. "Zora Neale Hurston". *Twentieth Century Authors*. New York: H. W. Wilson (1942): 694-95.
Lamothe, Daphne. "*Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the Vodou Intertext." 160: Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
Layne, Louisa Olufsen. "The Aesthetics of Bass : Aesthetics and Postcolonial Politics in Linton Kwesi Johnson's Poetry." University of Oslo: Master's thesis, 2013.
Locke, Alan. http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam358/wrightrev.html.[Accessed 17.04.2015]
Lupton, Mary Jane. "Zora Neale Hurston and the Survival of the Female." *The Southern Literary Journal* 15, 1 (1982): 45.
Marks, Donald R. "Sex, Violence, and Organic Consciousness in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Black American Literature Forum* 19, 4 (1985): 152-57.
Matza, Diane. "Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*: A Comparison." *MELUS* 12, 3 (1985): 43-54.
McGowan, Todd. "Liberation and Domination: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the Evolution of Capitalism." *MELUS* 24, 1 (1999): 109.
Noel, Carol Anne. "The Function of Folklore in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." 1985.
Noske, C., and R. Young. "A Postcolonial Aesthetic? An Interview with Robert Young." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing.* 50, 5 (2014): 609-21.
Nussbaum, Martha C. *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995.
Phelan, James. Their Eyes Were Watching God *(1937): Bildung and the Rhetoric and Politics of Voice*. Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2013.
Pondrom, Cyrena N. "The Role of Myth in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *American Literature* 58, 2 (1986): 181-202.
Racine, Maria J. "Voice and Interiority in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *African American Review* 28, 2 (1994): 283-92.
Rancière, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.
Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Literature*. Politique De La Littérature. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
Renfroe, Alicia M. "Interrogations of Justice in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Cycnos* 19, 2 (2002): 213-24.

Roberts, B. R. "Archipelagic Diaspora, Geographical Form, and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *American Literature* 85, 1 (2013): 121-49.
Roemer, Julie. "Celebrating the Black Female Self: Zora Neale Hurston's American Classic (Reclaiming the Canon)." *English Journal* 78, 7 (1989): 70-72.
Said, Edward W. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983.
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Harlem." *Social Text* 22, 4 [81] (2004): 113-39.
Sucker, Alyssa N. "Disavowing Social Identities: What it Means When Women Say 'I'm Not a Feminist, but…'". *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 28 (2004): 423-35.
Wiener, Gary and Group Gale. *Women's Issues in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Detroit: Detroit : Greenhaven Press, 2012.
Wilson, Janet, Cristina Şandru, and Sarah Lawson Welsh. *Rerouting the Postcolonial : New Directions for the New Millennium*. London: Routledge, 2010.
Wright, Richard. "Between Laughter and Tears." http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam358/wrightrev.html. [Accessed 17.04.2015]